is this desire?

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is this desire?

by occultiism

Summary

> “It cannot be love,” he whispers to Will. His cheek is warm and wet. It cannot be love.
>
> In which Hannibal and Will begin a relationship much sooner than anybody knew. An exploration into possession and love, childhood and grief, and Hannibal's inability to discern them.

Notes

> I just wanted to write about Hannibal being gross. It's going to get worse.

See the end of the work for more notes

this is my five string serenade...

“Tell me about your summers, Will,” Hannibal begins, watching Will closely. It is early, and yet dark outside, the winter this year a harsh and relentless sickness. Will is half-wild and agitated in his seat, and there is the sweet smell of a fever simmering very faintly beneath the aftershave, the smoke, the festering smell of a morgue.

“Which ones?” Will says.

“All of them. Any that you wish. Start with your childhood, perhaps. No burden of school and time on your hands. How did you cope?”

“I didn't,” Will says. He looks down at his wrists, where his veins are bright and thin. “The heat is what I remember. There was nothing to do. I would follow my father to the boatyards and lay around on the sand, collecting sea shells and crab legs, smooth glass that had been washed up. When I was young—seven, eight, I don't remember—I'd put them all in a jar and give them to him on his birthday. The world had shut its doors and I was trying desperately to find another way in.”

“What did he do with them, your father?”

Will smiles. He shakes his head. “I don't know. Never wanted to. Figured it would do me best not to.”

Hannibal smiles at him, crossing one leg over the other. “And when you were older? What then?”

“I discovered libraries, and museums. I spent most of my time staring into the glass reflections at the entomology exhibits and wishing I could crawl in there with them. Reading Plath and Salinger in the bedroom. Hungover and upset at the world. The normal things.”

“I wouldn't know.”

Will scoffs, tapping his fingers against the arm of the chair. “Tell me about your summers then, Doctor Lecter.”

“Colder than yours, I imagine. And with a different bookshelf—more so a regretful amount of philosophy. There's little to do but indulge the teenage need for self-pity.” Will laughs shortly, and mouths yes, God yes, as he nods. “Though I didn't take you for teenage rebellion,” Hannibal continues.

“I wasn't rebellious. I was miserable.”

“Trying to fit in?”

“Not particularly. I knew there was something different and I knew that everybody could tell. There was no use in trying.”

Hannibal drinks his wine, slowly, and watches Will over the rim of the glass.

“Were you lonely, Will?” He says.

“Were you?”

“Extremely, at times. There were days I felt so lonesome I thought I must have been the only one in the world.”

“What about your family?”

Hannibal pauses. “I left home when I was young,” he says. “And then I found I could no longer remember their voices.”

Will frowns at him, but he doesn't press. Instead he turns his face towards the window, his skin the color of milk. “Between days of sobriety my dad would look at me and see somebody else. I could never ask who it was. And our summers always ended the same: sun-sickness, dragging ourselves between towns, the same men in each one, the same boots behind the door. Always the same homesickness. The strange feeling of finding home in many places all at once, but never going back to it.”

“Was your father religious?”

Will shakes his head. He stares not at Hannibal but at the sweeping curtains behind him, to where the city lights split through in brilliant arcs of white. “He was God-fearing. It didn't matter. The delusions were the same.”

“Delusions?”

“He was no good at faith.” He shakes his head, sinking down further into his chair. “But he wanted me to be. He was frightened of Hell. Terrified of it. He wanted me to be good so badly that I couldn't help but get it wrong.”

“Even as a child?”

Will nods, frowning. He doesn't look up again, and the lamplight falls across his face in great glaciers of red. He wanders towards the window and presses his face so closely to the glass it begins to fog, and Hannibal watches the movement of his legs as he moves: the rhythmatic flexing of his muscles, the movement of his joints, the slide of bone across bone.

In the silence that follows Hannibal imagines Will as what he once was. Scarred only across his knees and elbows, sun-burn pink on his thighs. Bruised shins. Skin the color of cherry blossom. Afternoons sick beneath a gaping sun, dazed afternoons with small feet burning on the tarmac. Mosquito bites. Half-eaten peaches. Biting into asphalt. Into childhood. His teeth falling out one by one, tongue pressing against the bloody gap. And the sunset the color of the dragon fruit. And Will sticky with it, wet with light.

“How is Uncle Jack, Will?”

“Leaving me alone, actually. I can't figure out why. Either he doesn't need my help or he's beginning to doubt my involvement.”

“You're invaluable to him, Will,” Hannibal says. “Now that he has found you as his bloodhounds he will be no stranger to using you to sniff out his killer. Despite yourself, and my own concerns.”

“Oh, no—you gave him the all-clear. You can't back-out now.”

“Perhaps I underestimated how deeply his work would affect you.”

“Perhaps you didn't. I'm fine.”

“I'm sure you are. How have you been sleeping? You spoke before of sleep-walking.”

Unamused, Will turns, his eyebrows drawn together. He stands very still against the clouded window, his eyes narrow and flicking down to his palm. There is a cut underneath across his palm, the clinical plaster Hannibal can smell; and blood underneath, days old, metallic and damp with sweat. Unnerved by the sudden desire to pull it back, to pull it apart until it swells once more with blood, he watches the small twitches of Will's jaw and the lamp light caught between his teeth.

“I've just had a lot of work to do. Besides Jack and the profiles I've neglected my lectures. I can start sleeping again soon.”

“And what until then?”

Will presses a palm against the window and stares aimlessly into his own reflection, oblivious to the intensity Hannibal levels him with, how he fixates on the exposed part of his neck. His glasses are skewered. There is an uneven patch on his jaw. Soft light filters across his hair and he softens in the warmth, sweetened and pure.

“It's fine,” he reaffirms, and the glass fogs again. Hannibal would like to press him into it, to keep the imprint left behind.

Afterwards, Hannibal sits down in the chair Will had taken to feel the heat that lingers behind. He presses his cheek into the leather, slides his hands down to beneath his thighs as though to feel in his palms the molding of Will's thighs. It smells like sickness, and of woodsmoke, a distinctly masculine warmth. Still he is desperate. He drags down his hands. There is more: engine oil, something canine, coffee and salt, the underpinnings of dampness. And he can see it: cobwebs in the corners of the room, a static television, Will laying around on the floor until he is roused by light through the blinds, the color of knocked out teeth.

He has the sudden desire to press his teeth into the leather and wants to laugh at himself for it. He feels ridiculous, then, and sits back in his chair with the peculiar feeling of being scolded. Still—Will fills the space opposite him, and he can feel the hunger in the air.

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Darkness flowers like a bruise outside and Will is haloed by light. The projector—great shadows splitting across the hall—throws an image that glows blue and impersonal, casting a surreal likeness onto the wall that Hannibal does not recognise. An old case, then, something Will has taught before. There is a mechanical movement to his body that betrays the even ringing of his voice.

“We see it often: the unnerving of the conscience, that which dictates our ‘right’ and ‘wrong.’ They fantasize of a situation in which they are forced to act without responsibility, so as not to haven chosen. There is an obsession with tragedy. A fantasy: somebody hurting those they love so that they can prove what they are, that they are better than everybody else. Or more so: themselves. There is no better way to prove oneself than through violence.”

Will speaks as though there are no students in the room. The light is blue. In the shadows of the doorway, Hannibal lingers with his hands behind his back, pleased to find Will like this. His glasses are kaleidoscopic. His face is pale and bright. In the afternoon light, pale and sharp, there is a strange unearthly quality about him. It is not raining but the sky swells with pressure. Hannibal can taste it: the electricity in the air. Will raises a hand to the projected image and frames the mutilated body in his palm, and it is predictable. His stomach is open and everything inside has spilled out. Red all over the kitchen floor. Like jewels spilling out, rubies and garnets. Like fire in the camera-flash.

Afterwards, he approaches Will by his desk.

He is surprised to see him here and it shows through the dread on his face, as though expecting Jack to follow Hannibal to drag him away. When nobody comes, and the classroom is quiet and still, he looks at Hannibal with his eyebrows drawn up.

“You seem upset.”

“I'm not.”

Hannibal rests a hand on his desk, where there is a mess of pictures, all bloody and crude. They do nothing for him. He glides his fingers over the gloss. Will is quiet. He stares at the body on the wall. Shaking his head, he gestures vaguely to the spray of blood across the white wall and back to the body. “No worse than the others, is it not?” Hannibal says. “What is different with this one?”

Will's face is tight. “Doctor—” He scrubs a hand over his face, pale and sickly in the cool light, and looks at Hannibal's shoes. “We're not in therapy.”

“No, we're not. But I am still concerned for you, as a friend.”

Will nods. He takes off his glasses to clean the lenses with the sleeve of his jacket and like this Hannibal can see the deep shadows beneath his eyes, the color of peach-stones.

“I hope you're not over-exerting yourself”

“Doctor, everything's fine.” He is fidgeting, eyes very still from where they rest on his desk —the slight chip in the corner, mismatched papers, red ink blotting through, smudges of it on his fingertips. He turns away and begins to pack away his laptop, his books, the flask that he goes to drink from before he realizes it is empty. “You seem to forget I've been doing this longer than I've known you.”

The projector shuts off, and darkness sweeps across the room. Outside, thunder rumbles, low and nearby, and Will flinches slightly.

“Do you not like storms?” Hannibal asks curiously, running his hands over the back of Will's chair. He is reminded of their last appointment and pushes away the thought. The afternoon sizzles and swells.

Will shakes his head, uneasy. “My dogs. They won't—I need to get home to them.”

Hannibal does not want to see him go, but he cannot keep him here. Instead, he commits it to memory: here is the light, planetary and blue; here is the rapturous sky. Electricity murmurs, and Will is very quiet. There are messy curls around his face, a deep hollow in his neck. The thudding of his pulse—his pulse! Hannibal hates to see him go. Still, he has been patient for a very long time, and he can do it again.

As Will leaves, he watches the movement of his legs and feels incredibly selfish. Left behind is an impression of rot, and it smells very sweet.

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In the stomach of Wolf-Trap the air is frigid and cruel, and there is mist curling around his bright headlights, blanketing the sheen of its skin.

Hannibal parks his car far away enough that the sound will not carry. The grass is wet. Like a lantern, the moon glows soft and jaded and blankets the ground in silver, where the spiderwebs crystallize white. Will's house blurs like heat as Hannibal approaches. It is there and it is not. The gentle rocking of a boat. The door is wide open. The house is dark, and only the porch light is on.

Will staggers across the fields. Barefoot, still in his clothes from yesterday, a wild mess of curls on his head. He does not notice Hannibal's approach, or the feel of his fingers against his cheek. Underneath, his skin is feverish and damp. He smells of salt and sickness. Hannibal brings his palm to cradle his cheek, and as he brushes his fingertips against the curve of Will's cheekbone his eyes slant forwards into Hannibal's.

Hollowed and dark, these sightless pits. Hannibal presses his finger beneath Will's eye and he does not flinch, or move at all, and in the moonlight his skin gleams sickly and pale, shiny from the pearly gleam of sweat. The heat is staggering. His lips are chapped. When Hannibal slides his hand downwards to loosely wrap around his throat, his pulse is stuttering and languid, a lazy thing, not reacting to the sudden press of fingers against it. Hannibal smiles into the darkness, very slightly.

“Will,” he murmurs. “Can you hear me? Do you know who I am?”

Will doesn't react. Predictable. Inevitable. Hannibal would like to keep him out here underneath the moonlight but fears the cold will awaken his conscience, although it hadn't before. Still—he steers Will back to the house, and in the porch light his skin flushes a dirty shade of yellow.

Back inside, the dogs are restless. They sense the sickness in Will and have no language to tell him with. They crowd at their feet and Hannibal pushes them away with a gentle touch to their foreheads, and they retreat slowly to the beds, diligently watching Hannibal with a protective wariness. He will have to visit more, treat them more, and gain their appreciation; their distrust is endearing, if unsettling.

Will's fondness for them is sweet. They inspire a softness that is otherwise hidden beneath glasses and sharp words, bluntness, a strange and often rude choosing of truths. Regardless, Hannibal appreciates the honesty. It is uncommon for anyone else, for them to say what they mean, and Hannibal is no exception.

The sheets are damp where Will lays. His shirt is twisted and soft. Hannibal pushes back his curls and holds a hand to his forehead, where it is sweat-damp and too-hot. Wetness slicks up his palm, and he would be disgusted, were it anybody else. Beneath him, Will pants and squirms.

Hannibal admires this life of his. There are empty bottles cluttering his desk, papers half finished on the kitchen table, odd photographs and newspaper clippings stuck up on the walls. WHAT WAS THAT FIERY STREAK IN THE SKY? One reads. THE VIRUS TOOK MY LOVE. HOW CAN I SAY GOODBYE? Says another, much older. When the moonlight floods through the windows the whole room glows mechanical and bright, silver gleaming from the glass, the dust suspended in the air. A spider scuttles across the ceiling. A little heater glows lazily, orange and soft.

The strange light makes it hard to make out the dates or stories, the numbers and letters all smudging together, and he would like to ask Will about them. But he will be here again, he knows, another time, hopefully by Will's own invitation. He imagines cooking for him in this little home of his. There would be boots beneath the bed, unwritten Christmas cards on the desk, a terrible sense of domesticity in the air. Wine dark in mismatched glasses—or something white, for Will's own catch—and Hannibal listening to the crack of Will's teeth against his fork. Wide-eyed, mouth wide open. The heat of his throat as Hannibal's fingers slide inside, the roughness of his tongue, his arm—

A dog whines by his feet. Its fur is soft and thick. He pats it on the head carefully and meets its curious stare. They are quite sweet, when they are not shedding hair, or trekking mud

around, and Hannibal can understand Will's affection. Something to tend for, to keep, to keep warm and well cared for. Will is too intelligent to be his pet—and he would not like him to be, but it is something close. Someone to care for, to feed. There is a voyeuristic desire to have Will at his dinner table, flushed and sated, and he brushes his fingers over Will's cheek at the thought.

“Shhh,” he whispers to the dog. It cocks its head in interest. “We should let him sleep.”

He slips Will's eyelids close and covers him with a blanket, tucks it into the mattress. On the floor, there is a mess of half-finished books, some still open, margins busy with penciled-in thoughts. Blindly, unthinking, Hannibal reaches the first he can and tucks it into his jacket. It presses hard and sharp into the soft muscle of his stomach. It burns right through.

Before he leaves, Hannibal dips his fingertips into the dampness gathered at the hollow of Will's collarbone. He presses it to his tongue. Worship breeds low in his gut.

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“Something happened last night.”

There are violet half-moons below Will's eyes, displeasure in the curve of his lips. He sits heavily into his chair and scrubs a hand over his face, where it is pale and blotchy with pink across his cheeks. Outside, the cold permeates into the side-walk, and frost spikes inside the weeds there. His hair is half-wild, these unruly curls. It is getting longer, beginning to dust the back of his neck, and Hannibal discovers a fondness for it he didn't know he had. He would like to put his hands in it, to feel the resistance as he pulled.

“Sleepwalking again?”

“Yes. No. I can't remember,” he says, agitated. “It felt more like a dream—and it must have been, I know.” He looks at Hannibal warily, eyes darting and quick. “You were there. I dreamed of you.”

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, and inwardly preens. He did not expect Will to remember, but is interested in his interpretation of events, despite the anxious look on Will's face, the challenging frown on his lips. “Tell me what happened,” he says, with a slight tilt of his head. He keeps his expression neutral and warm to placate Will, and it seems to work; his posture relaxes slightly, and he slumps further into the chair.

“You found me, I think. I can't remember. It's all strange, as though I watched myself through your eyes instead of my own. I had left my house. I was cold—the air was cold.” He pauses, and Hannibal sinks into the memory: dew dampening his shoes, trees thrashing in the wind, the soft call of owls. “You took me inside. You laid me down. You took off my jacket and you pressed your fingers onto my face. Then I woke up this morning, and I felt terrible, and confused.”

Hannibal regards him curiously, masking his glee. “You seem more spooked by this than your normal dreams.”

“I know. I don't know why. Rather, it felt—too real. I thought I could feel it this morning. The touch of your hands still there.” He looks away, grimaces at himself. “I'm sorry. This is strange.”

“I disagree, Will. You know I encourage you to be honest, and regardless, I am unsurprised. Our dreams reflect the facets of the waking hours. It does not always have to be unpleasant.”

Will looks almost horrified; a flush rises on his cheeks. “Doctor, it's not like that.”

“I provide stability for you, Will. And I do care for you. Your dream reflects only this. It is reassuring that your unconscious mind associates your therapy with comfort.”

“A little Freudian.”

“A simple conclusion, rather. I would not let it worry you. You should appreciate the comfort they bring, rather. Remember the feeling. Remind yourself of it, often.” He crosses his legs, and dampens his excitement. “I only worry for your safety. Where did you walk to, in your dream?”

Breath fogging; moonlit skin; a horizon hazed with mist.

“Not far. Just outside my house. My feet are OK, but the ground is soft this time of year. It's hard to tell whether I actually slept-walked or just imagined that I did.” Eyes half-lidded, he stares at a point somewhere off Hannibal's shoulder. “It's humiliating.”

“I imagine the lack of control is distressing.” He watches as Will stands, flexing his hands, as he begins to pace around the room in his usual disorganized fashion. “And you know what I feel causes it. Perhaps you should take some time off work.”

“And you know I can't do that.” Will sounds cynically amused, and Hannibal smiles at the back of his head. “Work has been quiet, even. I've not been on a case for a week. Lecturing again feels almost strange.”

“You seem distressed after your last one.”

“We're not talking about that, Doctor.”

Hannibal stands and joins Will, hovering behind him again. He does not touch him, but leans in closely to smell the fervent scent beneath the aftershave. Will does not notice this time, so he leans in further. “Building forts, Will?”

“I've already dealt with it.”

“Have you?”

Will doesn't say anything, but Hannibal can see the twisting of his mouth in the gleam of the window. “There's nothing to talk about,” he says, eventually.

“Can I trust you to tell me if there is?”

“What? Yes. I tell you a lot of things.”

Back at his desk, Hannibal pours them a glass of wine each. Something dark, bitter, warm inside one's throat. “We talk about the present, and the future. But the past is something we do not explore often. I wonder what shadows stand in the doorways of your childhood.”

“Angry men. A little twin bed.” He accepts the wine and meets Hannibal's eyes. “You're a good psychiatrist, Doctor. I'm sure you've figured out most of it. Tell me. What was my childhood?”

“Lonely. You were exceptionally bright. The teachers were unsure of how to treat you. A difficulty with other children, I presume, an eccentricity unusual even for your age.”

“You're saying I was weird?”

Hannibal smiles at him lightly. “Yes. So was I. I imagine nobody knew what to do with you. Not even your father, or especially so. Describe him to me, Will.”

“Haven't I already? Religious. He liked to drink. He was good to me but he didn't know how to be a father. And he didn't know how to be a mother, either.”

“How does that make you feel?”

“Parentless.” He rolls his eyes. “Orphaned. But it's vulgar. You cannot trace my psyche to my childhood.”

“I agree,” Hannibal says quickly. “You're much more interesting than that, Will. You're the most interesting person that I know.”

Will doesn't look at him, but there is a little smile on his lips. “You must have patients more messed-up than me.”

“Perhaps. But their troubles are often common, pedestrian. You have a habit of surprising me.”

“A bad one?”

“I like you surprising me. Life must remain mysterious enough to satisfy my curiosity.” He leans forwards, braces his elbows on his knees. “I believe we were speaking about your father.”

“There's not much else to say about him.”

“When did he die?”

Will dips his fingers into the creases of his trousers and frowns. “Seven years ago.”

“Does it upset you?”

He shakes his head, takes a while to answer, as though chewing over the words. “I don't grieve for him. I haven't for a while.”

“You seem troubled, regardless.” He does not apologize for pulling the feeling out from him, for it would be ungenuine.

“It makes me troubled to think of what he knew of me before he died.”

“What were you like?”

Will looks pained, jaw clenched and eyes tight. He curls his fingers into his lap. “Not myself.” He stares into the shadows of the room. “It was before I moved here.”

Though Hannibal knows Will is unlikely to tell him more—knows his stubbornness well, he asks, “Why does it trouble you?’

Will doesn't answer him. He hadn't expected him to. Instead he looks into the unlit fireplace and presses his forearms into the arms of his chair. “I've misplaced one of my books,” he says.

and the luminous beam

Chapter Summary

discussions of Hurricane Katrina

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Come home with me. I'll cook for you,” Hannibal says as Will pulls on his coat.

“Now?”

“Yes, if you can. It is not so late, and the cold tonight calls for something warm, don't you think?”

Will frowns at him, but his eyes are bright. He wraps his arms around his stomach and tilts down his chin, so that he looks up over the top of his glasses. “You don't mind?”

“I insist, Will. You can follow me in your car.” Hannibal pulls on his own coat and opens the door to guide Will through, locking it behind them. “I promise to return you tonight,” he adds with a small smile. Will looks at his feet, and nods.

Outside the cold is harsh, relentless, the November this year something aching and blue. Spring calls out from the cavern of the sky and the sound is swallowed by the wound of winter. Apathy bleeds. The rooftops glitter. Streetlights spear into the darkness, flooding the sidewalks in white. There is desire oscillating in his throat, a distrustful pulse in his neck, and the world gleams technicolor and bright.

“I live close by” Hannibal says as he reaches his car, Will not far behind. In the swamp of streetlight his skin glints chromatic and dazzling, and his shadow stretches out something monstrous into the gloom. His cheeks are raw and feverish, eyes narrowed, hands stuck deep in his pockets.

He seems lifeless, standing there, and Hannibal wants to do something terrible. To kiss him, beat him, hit him until he cries. It would be easy—he has hunted men much larger before—and cruel. Will looks at him with his eyes hooded and sharp and Hannibal wants to press his thumbs into them. He was not an impulsive man, until Will.

Now he undulates between desires, indescribable fantasies. Still—he composes himself, says, “Follow me. Call me if you lose sight,” to Will's turned head, and watches as he climbs into

his car. Pale hands, pink and calloused, sliding across the steering wheel. Kaleidoscopic streetlights on his lips.

He drives slowly so that Will can follow, and to gather his thoughts. He has a meal planned already but he wants something special, significant, something to get Will back into his home again. He can imagine him stretched out on a loveseat, in the library, in the shade of the trees come spring. He can imagine him in many ways and in a lot of them he is dead.

When he pulls up to his house he unclasps his hands from the steering wheel and has to flex them to regain the feeling. He was not an impulsive man, and this is strange, disconcerting; the intensity of such desires is unsettling. He stands outside as Will kills his engine. He wants to crack his head into the door.

Instead—he counts the seconds until Will reaches him, the footsteps up to his front door. Inside, the hall is warm and dimly lit. The light is bloody. Will hangs up his coat and Hannibal imagines pressing him onto the hook.

“Would you like me to help?” Will asks, hovering by the counter. His gaze is curious and searching, flitting around the kitchen; to the shine on every surface, the faint smell of bleach in the air.

“No,” Hannibal says, tying an apron around his waist. “I would like you to watch, and relax. There is a bottle of wine on the table. Would you like to get it?”

“I shouldn't drink. I need to drive home.”

“Not even one glass, Will? It will go well with our meal.”

“Maybe if you tell me what we are eating” He runs his hands over the counter. Left behind is the slight imprint of his fingertips.

“I would like to surprise you, as you often do to me.”

“I might not like it.”

Hannibal pulls a knife from the block and holds it up to the lights overhead, white and clinical. The metal shimmers, sharpened and thin.“You will.”

Will watches him. It is strangely exciting.

He leans against the counter as Hannibal dices the onions, by the table when he slices the meat—pork, he says, to Will's questioning stare. Hannibal is used to an audience but they do not often regard him like this, with a curious intensity, as though cataloging his movements to recreate in their mind. Will gazes at him over the top of his glass but won't quite meet his eyes, instead watching the movement of his arms, the thudding of his hands against the counter. The pan bursts into a crest of fire and the color blazes in Will's eyes.

Shadows deep on his cheeks, the pink of his tongue darts across his lips. Wetness follows. His lips gleam. Hannibal says, ‘Please, take a seat,” and gestures to the dining room, and Will leaves without saying anything. He dazzles. Lures. Hannibal grips the knife harder.

“This is delicious. Thank you,” Will says, the words slow and smooth. He raises another mouthful to his lips and Hannibal watches the cut of his teeth through the tender meat, how his tongue laps at the sauce that escapes. It is irrecoverably voyeuristic, this obsession of his. With his eyes closed, Will wraps his lips around the fork and his throat bobs as he swallows, and Hannibal can smell the sweet appreciation of his, the gentle glow of his pleasure.

“It's my pleasure, Will.” Hannibal takes a bit of his own, at last. The flavor is strong and succulent, and he hums softly at the feeling. “Although I must admit, I did have your preferences in mind. If only fate could be so lucky.”

“Rather presumptuous, Doctor,” Will admonishes, but his tone is light. “How did you know what I would like?”

“You've told me stories of your childhood, of hot evenings with good food and a Louisiana sunset. I may have done some research.” He feels strange admitting it, as though he's done something shameful, and wants to take it back until he sees the open bashfulness that cracks across Will's face. Looking down to his plate, he stays quiet, but there is a little smile on his lips that reminds Hannibal of that night in his office, not long ago.

“I struggle to imagine you in Grand Isle, or Bossier City. You would get sick in one of your suits. I remember spending all day by the beach and puking all night. God. You'd hate it.”

“Why did you decide to move North?”

Will frowns at that and lets his fork rest on his plate, mulling over his thoughts.“It was a difficult time. My dad had died. I had been stabbed. It was after the hurricane, and New Orleans was wounded. I couldn't stay.”

“Describe it to me.”

Hannibal refills Will's glass and he drinks from it slowly, in less of a desire to savor it than to prolong his answer, the quiet that settles between them.

“I don't know how,” he says at last, looking over Hannibal's shoulder. He pushes his food around his plate and wraps his fingers around the stem of his glass. “They sent us out on boats, afterwards, to count the bodies. They warned us of looters but there was nothing left to loot. It had been stripped bare, skinned.” He takes a deep breath, rubs a hand over his face. “We spent days without sleeping. I dreamt of the bodies suspended in the water, bloated, half-rotted, eaten—the animals were starving too.”

“You were very young. It was cruel to send you out into the horror still thawing from childhood.”

Will shakes his head.“I hadn't been a child for a very long time, and there was nobody else to do it. We were just lucky to be alive, but I didn't think so then. I still dream about it sometimes.” He meets Hannibal's eyes, briefly, and his lips tip downwards. “We needed help but they didn't give it to us. And a lot of people died.”

Hannibal reaches over and unclenches Will's fist, where his nails have been pressing into his palm. Left behind are small red indentations, the angry flush of blood to the skin. His hand lingers across Will's knuckles. He wraps it back around his fork. “You swallow your experiences as a desperate struggle for stability and it is unmooring you, Will.” He tilts his head. “Were you frightened? Does it frighten you still?”

“Everybody was frightened.”

“And yourself?”

“As if I'd been gutted and carved, filled with something rotten. Each morning, we'd go out onto the water and the sun rose and the bodies swelled and eventually the rest of the world moved on, as though nothing had happened. I couldn't bear it. The city was diseased with loss.”

“Did you lose someone, Will?”

“It didn't matter. The city was underwater and everybody I knew was in some kind of pain. There was no room left for my own.” Will has stopped eating, and his pupils are narrow. He stares at some fixed point on the table and doesn't blink, unmoving, the soft sound of his breath in the quiet.

“Will,” Hannibal says, trying to catch his attention. His lips tip further downwards, and his eyebrows draw together, an almost comical expression of sadness. Sometimes he is so obvious it astounds Hannibal. He cannot imagine it.

“It was hot, still. The bacteria bloomed. Everything smelled like rot.”

Hannibal wraps his fingers around Will's wrist, the protruding bone there, and squeezes, the skin beneath turning white. Will looks up at him sharply, awareness sliding back onto his face. He shakes his head, picks up his fork, spears something with it and bites it without looking at what it is.

“Tell me about yourself,” he says after he swallows, eyes still low.

Hannibal hums. “What would you like to know?”

“I don't know. You just know so much more about me than I do you. It's unfair.” He sips his wine and looks up at the ceiling. “I know. What were you like as a teenager?”

Hannibal ponders over the question. “I spent many of those years at the banks of the Essonne with my aunt and uncle, then at a boarding school in Paris. The beauty astounded me. In winter the tourists fled, and the streets would freeze into white, but in summer the city

blossomed with life, and the sunlight breathed love into the people. It was terribly romantic. I began to draw; I felt it must be immortalized, although the likeness was never enough."

"It sounds lovely."

"It was," Hannibal agrees. "Have you ever been?"

Will scoffs, "No. I've only left the country a few times. And not for anything like that?"

"Work?"

"Something like that."

"Perhaps you should take a holiday."

Will laughs at him, a short, cynical sound. "You seem determined to have me not working. Is there an ulterior motive I'm not aware of?"

"If it is to make you relax, then yes. I would love to scheme a vacation for you."

Will smiles at him, small and doubtful, and raises his glass. "Jack Crawford would sabotage any attempt."

"He could try," Hannibal amends. Will looks down at his plate and spears another vegetable, his mouth still curved to deepen the shadows beneath his eyes. When he wraps his lips around the fork, he meets Hannibal's heavy stare, and the silence sizzles.

Afterwards, Hannibal washes the plates as Will dries them, standing companionably beside each other. This close, Hannibal smells the sickness beside him like something poisoned, occupying the empty space Will leaves behind when he moves.

"Why did you move to New Orleans?" He asks quietly, hands deep in the soapy water.

Will pauses his drying and glances to see if Hannibal is watching him, and he is, but inconspicuously, so that it is hard for Will to tell without staring himself. "I joined the police force there. A lingering dream for justice, maybe. Mostly I wanted to move away from my dad."

"The desire to create one's own space in the world is not uncommon for teenagers, much less for someone like yourself."

Will raises his eyebrows at him, but begins drying again. "What do you mean by that?"

"Someone with your empathy. It is difficult for you to socialize. The mirrors of your mind are vast, and I imagine that when you were so young they were even more so. You enjoy your space, and your respite from expectation. Am I correct in assuming you have always been this way?"

“In some ways,” Will agrees. “I did want my own space. I thought I would go crazy in another small town. Nothing to but ride out into the streets, lay around in parking lots. It was a very interesting city.”

“Did it feel like home?”

“Sometimes. But it was a difficult time. I didn't know what I wanted.”

Hannibal hands him the last dish and dries his hands by the oven, watching Will as he works. Outside, the darkness is impenetrable and thick. “Because you were young?”

“Yes. But I thought I was very mature.” He laughs at himself dryly, shaking his head. “I thought I was a lot of things. It was hard for me to differentiate between my own desires and those of the people around me.” He glances at Hannibal, and his expression softens into something amused. “You wouldn't have liked me back then.”

“You seem sure of it.”

“I am.” Will looks into the darkness outside and shifts on his feet. He glances around the kitchen, and Hannibal wants to ask him to stay. “I should be getting home,” he says. “Thank you for cooking. It was delicious. You knew exactly what I would like. It's impressive.”

“Thank you, Will.” Hannibal leads him to the hallway and watches him pull on his coat. “I've enjoyed your company. I'd love to cook for you again.”

Will smiles at him, quick and slight. “You're the strangest psychiatrist I've met,” he says, standing in the doorway. The air that floods in is biting and harsh. Will backs out onto the steps.

Hannibal smiles at him, slow and easy. Will bundles his hands in his jacket, and gives Hannibal one last look before turning away, already wind-swept and pale, hazy in the street-light glow.

Before he shuts the door, Hannibal watches Will to his car; how the light begins to pool inside the street, the roads already icing up. Hannibal imagines Will's car wrapped around a tree. A streetlight. Glass scattered across the road, the moon a mirrorball of light, blood smeared across the steading wheel. He can see it, Will's skull, cracked across the dashboard. The bone fractured, the dull mess of his brain leaking through…The legs bent in strange places, the teeth mangled in the jaw. A sea of coloured light. The ice splintered. Starlight gray and blunt.

He presses his back against the closed door and breathes through his nose. He stands in the kitchen without turning on the light, face pressed close to the window. Will's car has not moved. The engine is quiet. He sits in the driver's seat with his forehead pressed against the steering wheel, hands wrapped around it. Childishly, Hannibal presses a hand onto the glass, cool and damp, and wipes away the condensation that forms.

Will lifts up his head and hits it gently against the steering wheel a few times, braced against his wrists. When he looks up, his face is blank and washed in light. His hair is black. He

reverses out into the street and Hannibal follows the movement of his back lights with great precision, the spots of red fading into the darkness. He imagines grabbing Will by the hair and hitting his face into the wheel until it bleeds, until it breaks, the eye sockets collapsing in. He imagines lapping at the blood, afterwards. Starved for warmth. The heat of it in his mouth.

In his bedroom, Hannibal lies out in the darkness and reaches into his bedside drawer, feeling past the pencils and the notebooks and the papers until he feels the roughness of worn paper against his fingertips. He lays out Will's book onto his chest but doesn't turn on the light. Instead, he runs his fingers down the edges of the pages and feels the indentations of pencil marks, ink, coffee stains, feels the press of Will in between the letters.

The darkness is grand. His mind buzzes with the thrum of curiosity, and he closes his eyes to the sound of his heartbeat in his ears. Will lingers behind his eyelids, the smell of him still in the air; sickness, pine, wet earth, something bitter and homely.

He wants to kill him but he doesn't want to see him dead. It cannot be, he thinks. It cannot be.

Chapter End Notes

I know little about food and don't want to get anything wrong. So please just pretend I did.

the stench of a love for a younger meat

Chapter Summary

An unknowing date.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this has taken so long. I have a vague idea of where this is going but the getting there is twisting out of control. This was going to be one chapter but it just kept going so I'm splitting it into two...
Chapter titles are just from songs I listen to as I write btw...This one is from Disintegration by the Cure.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Slicked up in fortune, appetite, Hannibal presses his hands into the soft heart of a lover and emerges to find himself desolate. It has been compulsive; he had not planned such gore tonight, but in the strange afterglow of Will's presence his hands were searching, desperate for something to mold.

The man had been a past lover of his, a brief affair of passion that Hannibal had sunk into the mattress with a detached arousal that didn't match the boredom inside. Whiskey kisses. Heart-shaped bruises. He had wanted a warm body but found the sex lacking in intimacy. Predictable. There is more now—a desire for something great, such rawness he has not wanted before. He would like to skin Will, obsesses over what he would find inside. Undoubtedly, something grotesque. Colossal.

Beneath him, the man writhes, but Hannibal is in no mood to listen to his gargles and cries, praying and pleas. His blood spills onto the table and Hannibal twists his hand, cruel, careless, his plastic suit glinting and slippery.

“Please,” the man cries. His arms spasm. Hannibal clenches his fist, pushes his fingers into the fruit of his heart. When he goes still, he extracts his hand and stares at the mess he has made. Gore splattered across the floor, a pulverized lung, the liver misshapen and bruised. Beneath the blood there is the crude smell of piss, sweat, the acrid ache of fear bleeding through. Hannibal wrinkles his nose and wraps his fingers around the man's throat, inexplicably angered by his display of vulgar humanity.

Will would be something beautiful, he imagines. No ugliness to poison Hannibal's design. His beauty would astound him, raze cities, crown the world in light, once split open. Peel

back the skin to reveal a love-sick heart, diseased with itself; open the skull to find the brain, burning and tender, a disorder of rotting clusters.

Hannibal steps out from himself and into the doorway of his mind. Past the frostbite gleam of his childhood, the sun-bathed months of Florence, into something sweet and saturated with desire. Will across his table, Will in the seat opposite his own, Will in his lap. He lifts the dead-weight from the table and drops it to the floor, presses his hands into the blood. It is thick. It has begun to clot already.

He removes the intact liver with precision and cuts out what he can recover. By the time he is done with his tableau he is quiet and calm, stripping off the suit and stepping into his own self again, curious and sated. He can smell the blood still, the bitterness of panic, pain thickened in the air. He scrubs the blood from the floors, until everything is clinical and pale, bleach so strong in his nose it burns.

Arcs of pleasure crackle through him. He does not feel so ravenous. By the time he is back home, he pulsates with satisfaction and the indulgence of the kill. It is not Will, but it is enough. He says this to the calculated figure in his reflection, as though not himself. It is enough.

*

Jack calls him from the crime scene, impatient and tight.

“Doctor,” he says, voice tinny and sharp, “Sorry to disturb you like this. Could you come down? I need Will but he is taking his damn time to get here.”

“Forward me the address, and I will be there as soon as I can.” Hannibal smiles into the speaker. He would like to get there before Will, to see how his expression falls across his face. He wants to hear his analysis, his dissection.

Hannibal knows he is being dangerous, toying the line between recklessness and desire, Will undoubtedly the only one capable to see through the constructed facade. But only with time. Will does not have time. His mind is volatile and cannot be maintained like this for long, Hannibal knows. There are things Hannibal can control, and Will's sickness is one of them. He knows this. He repeats it to himself.

What Will doesn't know will hurt him. It is inevitable. The natural progression. Until then, Hannibal cannot bear to let him go, now that he has begun to dip his fingers into the well of his thoughts. He inspires an honesty in Hannibal that is as frightening as attractive, provokes ideas that surprise him. He was not an impulsive man. He is not, still, he reassures himself.

He cancels his appointments for the afternoon. The sky blisters with black.

*

Will has not profiled the Ripper before, not in a fresh crime scene like this. It is not familiar; the cuts are untidy compared to that of his others, crude but neatened at home. Messy in less of a lack of control but as a test to Will. Curious to where his intelligence sparks. If he can tell.

If he can tell, Hannibal knows he must kill him, like he knows his mother tongue and his home here. If he can't, he will keep going until he can. A monument of bodies by his front door. *Can't you see me? Look at what I do for you! Doesn't it astound you? Doesn't my devotion astound you*?

He paints disgust across his face as he steps into sight of the body, circled by tape, still in the kitchen where he died. The entire neighborhood has been closed off. A swarm of lights. Men in dark uniforms and gloves prizing open cupboards in search of inexisting answers, foreheads beaded with sweat, the smell of it viscous and cheap.

The tableau is unlike himself.

The carvings are harsh, jagged slashes across the chest cavity and abdomen. Through the skin still remaining, the ribs peak through, and his midsection gapes behind pulled back flesh. Left behind is a bloodied chasm the spine dissects through, held open by knives stuck through each flap of skin and embedded into the cupboard door behind them. His eyes are removed, the dark sockets yawning and bloody, and through the hung open jaw there is a tongueless mouth.

It lacks artistry. Blood pools on the floor, unable to be wiped clean. Piss soaking through the floorboards. Something more—vomit on his neck, the sour smell of bile. Hannibal is half-disgusted by what he had made; it is crass and rudimentary, grossly lacking in the elevated grace he normally creates.

Regardless, it is not for Hannibal. It is for Will. He steps into the room and his whole face shutters, spasms and flattens into something part horrified and intrigued. He twitches, blinking rapidly, as he adjusts to the scene. His hands flex and relax again. He steps around a river of blood drying on the tiles.

“Jack?” He calls, glancing at Hannibal, who quickly schools his face into something horrified, looking anywhere but at the mess he has made.

“Good. You're here.” He stands a foot away from Will and grimaces at the body. “You need a minute?”

Will nods. “Five. Just—” He steps closer, and wrinkles his nose. The action is strangely sweet. “Can you get everyone out?”

Jack shouts for everyone to leave. “And you, Dr Lecter,” he adds, when Hannibal doesn't move.

Hannibal gives him an even, calculating look, but follows him out anyway. He wishes for Will to call out to him, to ask him to stay, for Hannibal to watch as the gore burns into his brain. It is only the first, he reminds himself. There will be more, he wants to say to Will. There will be more.

“It's not butchery,” Will says, after he lets everyone back in. His face has paled and he shifts almost manically, buzzing with an inexplicable energy that he seems unsettled by. His eyes are wide, and he shakes his head a few times, as though trying to clear away his thoughts.

In his periphery, Zeller whispers something to Beverly who gives him an admonishing look, to which he shrugs and gestures to the body. He understands: it looks like butchery, relentless mutilation, an uncontrollable expulsion of anger and violence. It is not, Hannibal knows; he is not resigned to thoughtless design. Each laceration was calculated, each gash measured to mimic something savage. There is brilliance, concealed beneath the brutality. He would not expect them to understand.

“Tell me why, Will,” Jack says.

Will frowns at him and slips his glasses back onto his face. “I need some more time,” he says.

“No. Just from this. This is savagery. Tell me why it is not.” Jack stands in impatience and Hannibal would want to kill him for it if he were not putting Will exactly where he wants him.

Will lifts up one hand and brings it to the body, never quite touching, just hovering over the jagged outline of the stomach. “There's vulgarity here. The killer is not vulgar but he is—amusing. He finds himself facetious. This is facetious.” He traces his finger up to the neck, where there is a wide fingerprint bruise from the only show of Hannibal's anger. Reckless, but too convoluted with color to discern any identifiable hand span. Will mimics the strangulation with his hand cupped over the neck, still not touching, and closes his eyes. He flexes his fingers. Hannibal drinks in the sight.

“The cuts are calculations disguised as brutality. It is not the same. The killer is not so… pedestrian.”

“Why would a killer disguise his work like this?”

Will looks up at the ceiling. “I don't know.”

“Are you sure it is purposeful, Will?” Hannibal interjects, stepping close to hover at Will's shoulder. He looks down the curve of his neck. “Why go to such great lengths to disguise his intention?”

“You were a surgeon, Doctor. Can't you see the difference?” He looks over his shoulder, under the dark rim of his glasses, and his pupils constrict in the bright lights.

Hannibal can—but mostly because he knows. He looks over the body and tilts his head as though in consideration, leveled with Will's impatient gaze. “If you look for it, perhaps.” His answer is purposefully vague. Will turns away.

“You normally have more than this, Will.” Jack stares into Will's head. “What aren't you saying?”

“I need more time.” He sounds clipped and tight, irritation spotting through. “Give me a few days. Pictures. Autopsy reports. You can't find a killer from this, Jack.”

Jack shoos a local cop out of the door. “You can have whatever you want. I just want your cooperation.”

“You have it.”

Will makes an aborted movement like he wants to throw up his hands. He turns back to the body, and reaches up a hand. “What is it you were looking for, and couldn't find?” He says very quietly, and Hannibal imagines only he can hear it. Will's brows dip and Hannibal wants to press his face into the wet mess of the body. See how I ache for you, Will. Marvel at my wound.

“Come out for lunch with me, Will.”

Hannibal lays a hand on Will's shoulder, where he is still turned towards the body. The forensic team work around him, regarding him with sidelong glances and curious looks. Katz scrutinizes the body's fingernails for any defensive wounds. Price searches for fingerprints. A few local cops prowl around and pretend to know how to react. Someone throws up in a plant pot. Will doesn't say a word.

“Will,” Hannibal repeats.

“Yes?” He turns to face Hannibal and his eyes are bright, accentuating the bruising beneath them.

“Come out for lunch with me.”

Will frowns at him. “I can't.”

Hannibal is not deterred. “You will work better if you are well fed. Your mind requires sustenance, even if you would like to think it doesn't.”

“I'll have something later. Promise. If Jack lets me go,” he adds with an exasperated laugh. “You don't have to stay.”

“Perhaps a conversation will elucidate this killer.” He meets Will's eyes, unblinking, unwilling to concede. “For me, Will. I would appreciate the company.”

Will stares at him—or rather, the slope of his neck—until he nods his head sharply, a sharp, awkward movement. “I have to go back to the lab this afternoon.”

Hannibal smiles at him, thin-lipped and without teeth. “Then I must be selfish for your company while I can. Come. Our minutes are precious.”

*

The restaurant Hannibal chooses is charming and quaint, expensive, and has a neatly tiled roof that shines iridescent in the winter sun.

Hannibal leads Will through the door with a hand hovering over the small of his back, not quite touching, just a constant presence he wonders if Will can feel. “The chef here has inspired many recipes of my own,” he says in a low tone, guiding Will to a table near the window. “I've found reputation does not always precede quality. There is something attractive in food made for the pleasure of the hungered guest, and not for a critic too enamored with pretense to appreciate the passion within.”

He sits opposite Will and catches the eye of a waitress, who watches them curiously from the kitchen entrance. Will is underdressed, undoubtedly, but not horribly so. It is more likely the shifting of his eyes that draws attention, and Hannibal's well-tailored charm.

The menus have no prices. The lights are low and sensual. Hannibal leans across the table to speak into Will's personal space. “The seafood here is excellent. Have you seen something you would like?”

Will shakes his head and combs his eyes over the menu. “One minute.”

“The Prieur Montrachet is also exceptional.”

Will looks up at him, seeming half-panicked for a moment. “I'm not good at this.”

“Ordering?”

“Yes. Restaurants. French wines.”

He looks back down at his menu, curling his fingers tightly around the edges. Hannibal watches him for a moment, the crease of his brow, the warm light blotting across his cheeks. His skin is still flushed from the cold, colored like raw-meat. His fingertips are pink.

“Can I give a suggestion?”

Relief splinters across Will's face. He looks up, then down, then up again, eyes flitting across Hannibal's face. “Yes. Please. Please do.”

Hannibal leans forward and explains each dish with his own thoughts on each, and Will relaxes. In the end, Will orders a lobster agnolotti, and Hannibal a white truffle fettuccine. A bottle of wine joins them, and they share it between them.

“Tell me about the scene today, Will.”

“Elusive.” He spears a piece of agnolotti and chews it thoughtfully. Hannibal watches his throat as he swallows, the dampened shine of his fork from his mouth. “His forts are better than mine.”

“You are struggling to empathize with him?”

Will shrugs. “The reconstruction is hazy with conflict. This is not his first kill, but the presentation is new. It is ill-fitting, and unbecoming. I don't think he will kill like this again.”

“Nor the copycat,” Hannibal adds, too see the frustration bloom on Will's face. He shakes his head, resting his fork on his plate.

“It's difficult to profile a killer who is not even himself.” His cheeks are slightly flushed from the wine, almost tipsy, and his words stumble from his lips. “I stepped into the scene and the killer stepped out. It's almost mocking. I can see him lingering at the edges, feel the smudges he left behind. He's a sadist. Confident that he won't get caught.”

“Despite your objections you have seen deeper than I imagined.”

“No. I'm seeing what he wants me to see. There's almost a familiarity here.”

Hannibal pauses, sips his wine, swallows down the excitement on his teeth. “You feel as though you've met him?”

“Maybe I am projecting from my other work. I've been lecturing all week about the copycat, Garret Jacob Hobbs, the Chesapeake Ripper…it's becoming convoluted.”

Hannibal catches Will's eyes and holds his stare, leaning forwards slightly, fork pausing in the air. “The Chesapeake Ripper?” He asks.

Will shakes his head. “It can't be him. It is lacking in a distinct theatrical display. He wouldn't be so…conventional.”

Hannibal nods. “The Chesapeake Ripper is consistently ostentatious. He delights in sadism, in elevating human to art, insignificance to beauty; revels in the FBI's futile hunt. The scene here is brutal, crude. Little beauty to be found in the mess this killer has left.”

“I've not profiled the Ripper before, not at a fresh scene like this.” He tilts his head, thoughtful and quiet, taps his fingers on the stem of his glass. “I wonder what stains he would leave behind. If he would let me see him, anything at all.”

“You are intrigued by him?”

Will spears another piece. His eyes are glazed from drinking, not quite drunk but looser, easier at holding Hannibal's eyes. “It's a disconcerting feeling,” he says. “I think about it all the time.”

When the waitress returns with the check, she places it in front of Hannibal.

He hands her his card. Will opens his mouth. The waitress gives him a sweet look and Will looks sharply at Hannibal, a flush rising on his neck. “Dr Lecter,” he says. She hands back his hard and puts it back into his wallet. Before Hannibal can move it, Will grabs the check and reads it quickly.

“You bastard,” he hisses at Hannibal. He pushes back his chair and beelines to the exit, his head ducked down, clutching the check in one hand. Hannibal watches him leave with a sick glow of satisfaction in his chest, and the waitress gives him another curious look before wishing him well and slipping back to the kitchen.

Outside, Will leans against the wall, trying to light a cigarette. Mist hangs thickly, the air damp and cold. His hand is cupped around the end of the cigarette, and his lips press tightly into the filter, cursing as the flame flickers and ebbs. He swears under his breath. The end lights up and he inhales quickly, but the air is too wet, too cold, and he leans his head back against the wall. Hanging from his fingertips is the unlit cigarette. He slides it back into his wallet.

“That was unprofessional, Doctor,” he says, turning his head to stare at Hannibal. “I don't appreciate it.”

Hannibal steps forward calmly, grateful for the lack of cigarette smoke. “My intention was not to embarrass you, Will. I only wanted to indulge you.”

“Let me pay you.”

“No,” Hannibal denounces.

Will scowls at him. “I'm not being indebted to you.”

“You're not.” Hannibal takes another slow step forward. “But you can repay me by accompanying me again, if you feel you must.”

Will laughs at him, dry and incredulous. “You're unbelievable.” He hits his head gently against the wall and rubs at his eyes. “God. I need a smoke.”

He laughs again at the way Hannibal frowns at him, slightly shrill, and shakes his head. “You enjoy this,” he accuses, “You like seeing me like this.”

“Like what?”

“Confused. Debilitated. I think you have some control issues, Doctor.” His tone is light, but his eyes are searching. The streetlights make the fog glow orange and hazy.

“Does it bother you?” He asks, curious and probing.

Will looks out into the street, lips tilting downwards. He hums, face fluttering with a sequence of small expressions, eyebrows twitching, tongue darting out over his lips. “I don't like feeling helpless.”

Hannibal follows his eyes. Their cars are hardly visible, blanketed in the fog, and he has an absurd spike of worry in the thought of Will not making it home. He swallows down the feeling. Imagines Will's brain splattered across the wind screen. “You're not helpless, Will. I'm right beside you.”

Will is quiet for a while, cheeks coloring again in the cold. Frost has begun to lace across the sidewalks. Their breaths cloud silver and light. “I'm not stupid,” he asserts.

“I know you're not.”

He raises an eyebrow at Hannibal. “Do you? You set me up.”

“It was not my intention,” Hannibal says. “I only wanted to show you one of my pleasures, Will.”

Will steps away from the wall and into the mist, boots crunching on the frozen leaves there. “I don't think your pleasures are mine, Doctor.” He looks back over his shoulder, and there is an unfamiliar expression on his face. “But thank you. I hadn't said that. I appreciate you trying with me.”

Hannibal smiles at him, self-assured and pleased.

“You're very welcome, Will.” Hannibal says as they reach their respective cars. “But there may be,” he adds. “There are still many for you to try.”

Chapter End Notes

Cigarette scene was written after I couldn't light my cigarette because it was so foggy. Life is so hard.

why is the measure of love loss?

Chapter Summary

Hannibal being cruel, then kinder, but also cruel.

Chapter Notes

Wrote about half of this in one sitting, so I apologise for any mistakes! Thank you for sticking with me until here <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“How is your case going?”

Hannibal sits opposite Will, legs crossed, hands resting on the plush arms of his chair. Will shifts, an exasperated movement, his eyes fluttering shut as he twists his hands in his lap.

“There is no evidence. Predictable,” he says. “Jack's pissed. It's inconceivable to him that the level of mutilation leaves nothing behind. We've been looking for days. We won't find anything.”

“Why are you so sure?”

Will sighs. “He's intelligent, experienced. We're looking for answers where there will be none, and it's irritating.”

“Tell me about your profile. What urge is he satisfying? What drives his desire?”

Will is quiet, looking up to meet Hannibal's eyes. “Curiosity. It's becoming clearer. Last night I dreamed of him, this faceless being, hands sunk inside another faceless man's chest. Blood up to the elbows, all over the floor. And I had the strange impression that he watching me, that he knew that I was watching him. Then I killed him. I was killed. I was both at once, everyone all at once, the killer and the victim and myself.” He shakes his head, a soft laugh in his voice. “There was boredom, a missed opportunity. He was not satisfied by the tableau.”

“Do you feel close to him?” Hannibal asks, near-desperate for his answer. Tell me you see me, Will. Tell me I frighten you, and I will want you even more.

“Not enough. Not from one body.” He looks up sharply, and frowns “Not that I want him to kill again. God.”

Hannibal leans forward, clasping his hands together. “Have you identified the body?”

“Yes. A banker called Jonathan Howard. Single. No kids. Lived alone. Went out to work on the day he was murdered and didn't show up the next day, or the next. His neighbor complained of a strange smell, which, in this weather, should not have happened so fast. The killer maxed out the heating. Accelerated decay. He wanted him to be found, fast.”

“And the organs? What has he done with them?”

Will stands and starts pacing around. He smells very slightly of sweat, and sickness. “Trophies. Jonathan Howard was empty, carved out. We've not found anything close by, so he must have taken them” He looks at Hannibal, and his lips twitch in a cynical half-smile. “Like a pumpkin. Gutted and hollowed and carved. Maybe if he had put a candle in him, the light would shine through the skin.”

“It would certainly be an literal twist to Halloween,” he says, watching Will's throat as he swallows. “Tell me about Mr Howard? How well can you see him, Will?”

“He was ordinary. No irredeemable flaws that we have found. He was not a rapist, or abuser. He was writing Christmas cards on the table where he was killed. Either the killer knows something we don't or there is no connection. Just bad luck for Jonathan. Good luck for the killer.”

Hannibal tilts his head and watches Will through the framing of his firelight. His mouth is eager with anticipation. “You said this killer was hiding his true intentions. If you were to peel back his skin, defile and expose him as he did to Jonathan Howard, what would you see inside?”

Will stares at a blank space of paint on Hannibal's wall. “Loneliness. He's insatiable, gluttonous for life. He is better than everyone else, transcended the plains of our commonality. He's playing a chess game and changing the rules so that no one else can touch him—and no one else can figure out what he wants, or what game they are trying to win.” He turns to face Hannibal, and he has the curious impression of being skinned, Jonathan Howard himself. Will's eyes are sharp, his expression bare, and he looks very closely to the seams of Hannibal's person suit, so close to pulling back the stitches, and peering inside.

“He seeks something to soften the ache, something impossible. His grief is so wide he cannot find anything large enough to fill it.”

Hannibal startles, minutely; his fingers spasm on the chair arms, and he hopes that Will has not seen.

“You seem to know him well, Will. I wonder how well he knows of you.”

“Enough, I'm sure.” He walks closer to Hannibal's desk, “Freddy Lounds has already published. She's spun some awful story about a violent sociopath who's found his footing.” His voice rises in pitch, becoming scathing and mocking. “*This killer has finally recreated his fantasies into the hands of the FBI. I wonder, when will Will Graham do the same*?

“Tasteless,” Hannibal says, and Will gives him an amused look. “Miss Lounds is flirting with a court-case, Will. Didn't Jack Crawford warn her against writing about you?”

Will rolls his eyes, leaning against the edge of Hannibal's desk. “Not that it would stop her. She's a spider in the doorways of the FBI, spinning a web to catch us all up in. I can't even say anything to her. Jack would kill me. Then she would haunt me in the afterlife, forever.”

“She would be unworthy of your effort. I imagine the grave she is digging for herself is deeper than what we could manage. Although I do admire her dedication,” he admits. “Have you been conducting interviews? You seem worn-out.”

Will scrubs a hand over his face. “It's that obvious?” He grimaces. “Yes. The neighbors heard nothing, saw nothing, have no usable security footage. It's like nothing happened. The world just kept on moving, whether he was alive or not. It didn't matter. That was what the killer thought: it didn't matter. It doesn't, still.”

“It is a sobering thought to realize our insignificance. We navigate our lives as nothing more than an arrangement of atoms, made with the same elements as everybody else. At the molecular level, we are united: carbon, hydrogen, iron in our blood. Poets will call it stardust.”

“What do you call it?”

“Something unnameable. The closest to which would be an uncomfortable feeling of banality. We grieve for ourselves, and call it unique. There is a desire to be something extraordinary, and it is, ironically, something we all share.”

Will looks at him for a few seconds, holding his eyes, his skin slick with orange light. He simmers with sickness. The evening bulges with pressure.

“I've been grieving my whole life, Doctor. I don't think I could stop.”

Hannibal nods, a jolting thing. An unfamiliar feeling of apprehension bubbles in his gut, foreign and disconcerting. “So have I,” he says. “I carry it with me, and there is no place to put it down.”

Will brings back up the case, and begins pacing around the room again. He theorises; Hannibal admires his intelligence. As they near the end of the session, a quarter of an hour left to go, he near collapses onto the chair and presses a hand to his forehead.

“I think I'm getting sick. Maybe I should go home.”

His forehead is slick with sweat, cheeks shiny and glittering, and his hair falls limp into his eyes. Hannibal walks over to him, stands in front of his chair. He looks up at Hannibal and he drinks in the sight, fixes it into his mind. A thin glaze of sweat between his eyebrows. Eyes hooded and hazy. Narcotic smile, a flash of teeth. He slumps backwards, blinking very slowly, like a snake. Something venomous, with its teeth removed.

Hannibal crouches in front of him. Will shakes. His palm is damp. Opiate heavy, a mouth of disease. Curls flattening to his forehead. Hannibal takes his wrist between his hands and rolls up the sleeve, and beneath the skin is both hot and cold, a feverish undulation, veins bulging as his muscles twitch. He presses his thumb into the vein at his elbow, feeling it shift beneath the pressure. He is dehydrated, under-fed; there is a quick vasodilation of the capillaries in his face, and the blood rises.

Well practiced, seamless, the needle slips in. The plunger depresses. Hannibal rises and cups his hands around the slick skin of Will's face, fingers dipping into the moisture gathering in his neck. He leans forward to press his nose into the pulse of his carotid artery, breathes in the sweetened scent of his illness. He wants to press his teeth in, to feel his way to the esophagus with his fingers parting the flesh.

He does neither. The desire aches in his tongue. Will slumps further down the chair, shaking harder, his eyes twitching uselessly around the room. He seizes. He smells like rot. Hannibal presses his forehead to his and lets his lips hover just over Will's, never quite touching, just breathing the warm air that ghosts across his chin.

“We are made from the same star, Will. Our bodies have the same home.” He runs his fingers through Will's hair, tugging through the knots. “You will understand why I must do this to you. Why you must suffer for me.” He speaks into his mouth, very quietly, a soft murmur that dissolves into his skin. Beneath him, Will shudders. He spams and twists.

He wipes the sweat from Will's face and rolls down his sleeve, sits him up again, and stands to peer out of the window. He talks, inconsequential things, repeats them until he hears movement behind him. He can smell the moment Will slides back into himself, how the air spikes with panic.

“Doctor,” he asks, his voice scratched and weak.

Hannibal turns quickly to face him, worry in his expression. “Are you feeling alright, Will?” He stands beside him and frowns. “You are pale. I apologize for keeping you.”

Will blinks up at him, still not quite fully aware. “What time is it?” He asks, rubbing a hand across his eyes.

“8:16.”

“I think I'm getting sick. I should go home.” Hannibal wants to smile at him, press his face between his hands. Instead he nods and guides Will to the door, who is resolutely not mentioning the time he has suddenly lost. Neither does Hannibal. Will doesn't need to know everything.

“Will you be safe to drive?” He asks, out of courtesy. He won't be, Hannibal knows. It will be impressive if he is not pulled over.

Will nods quickly. “Yes. Don't worry. I probably just need to rest.”

Hannibal holds the door open for him, and watches Will's eyelids flicker to adjust to the sudden light of the exit room. “Then I hope it passes quickly. Please call me if you need anything. It is a cold night for sickness, Will.”

“I'll be fine,” he replies quickly, pulling on his jacket. “I'll light the fire. My dogs won't let me freeze.”

Hannibal nods in agreement, picturing Will huddled amongst his dogs, a mess of fur and illness. “Your loyal companions,” he amends. “I will see you soon. I believe you agreed to repay me with your company.”

Will laughs at him, a dry, humorless sound. “You have a strange perception of debt, Doctor Lecter. Most people would prefer the cash.”

“I thought we agreed I am not like ‘most people.’” He offers a slight smile. “Call me when you are feeling better, and we will arrange a date.”

Will shifts. He tucks his hands into his pockets, and avoids Hannibal's eyes. “OK,” he says, turning to leave. “Talk to you then.”

*

“Will likes you,” Alana says, walking beside one another down the twisting halls of the academy. Her shoes click against the floor, wedge heels to match the slim cut blue of her dress, the long waves of her hair.

“I should hope so,” Hannibal replies, folding his hands behind his back. “I like Will. It would be unfortunate for the sentiment to be unreciprocated.”

Alana gives him a curious look, eyes wide and searching. She shifts her papers in her arms. “You must forgive me for being surprised. You know how Will is about psychiatrists, and I can't picture him enjoying the opera.”

He does not think she is jealous of Will—more of Hannibal, if she is jealous at all. It is a strange feeling; he has the sudden desire to lash out, shake her, tell her the awful things Will has done, the things that he will do.

“We interest one another. Our differences balance our boredom, and with time I believe he has begun to trust I am not only interested in his empathy. We complement one another; I find myself looking forward to his company.”

Alana nods, and Hannibal does not miss the suspicious twitch of her expression. “I'm glad you are getting along,” she says, then, “How is he doing?”

“Are you asking as a psychiatrist, or as his friend?”

“I'm not asking you to break confidentiality. I just want to know he is doing OK. Jack means well, but he is careless with Will.” She frowns. “Have you talked to him about it?”

Hannibal nods. “He is aware of my thoughts on his work. I only wish he would consider them as more than a professional suggestion. But I understand his need for autonomy. He strives to feel useful.”

“You cannot be both his friend and his psychiatrist, Hannibal.”

“I'm aware.” He glances at her, the thin line of her mouth. “I am content with the relationship we have.”

They fall silent for a moment, the only sound the clicking of her shoes, the distant hum of voices. She shifts her papers again and glances behind her. “Did Will tell you that he—”

“Kissed you?” Hannibal interjects, at her pause. “Yes. He seemed upset about it.”

Alana winces and glances at him, her footsteps slowing. “It wouldn't be right. He knows that.”

“I agree. It would be unfair to both of you.”

She nods tightly. “We are both intelligent enough to understand why it wouldn't work. Doesn't make it any less awkward now. I feel bad.”

“You shouldn't. Will would not like you to. He cares for you, but understands why it cannot be reciprocal. You would both do best to not let it alter your relationship. Avoidance is an act of confession, and you should not poison what you have.”

“I don't *have* anything.” She shakes her head, suddenly self conscious. “Sometimes I wonder if he even likes me at all. He's been different lately, paranoid, forgetful. Jack is toying with something he could not come back from, if the worst thing that could happen happens.”

“And what would be the worst to happen?”

“That he hurts himself. Or someone else. He's worked very hard to get where he is. And I do not want carelessness to knock it down.”

Hannibal tilts his head at her, curious and intrigued. These mentions of how Will was before, something different, unspoken about. It hangs in the air between them like unwanted company and Hannibal does not want to ask it to leave. “You do your best with him, Alana. It's all we can do, and it's all we must do. He owes it to himself to understand his limitations, but we cannot force him.”

She nods at him, and her eyes are wide and soft. Wait for what he will become, he thinks, desperate and wanting. It will be something monumental. There is not yet a name for what he will be.

*

Six days later, winter-soaked and cold-bitten, Hannibal stands on an icy corner in Baltimore and waits for Will. It has been longer than he would like; he has not seen Will since their last appointment, but Jack had Will wrapped in cases and Will has himself caught in lectures and grading.

To pass the time, Hannibal had been sitting by his windows and running his fingertips over the indentations in Will's book.

Why is the measure of love loss?

Then: *I shall think of you everyday, many times a day. Your hand prints are all over my body. Your flesh is my flesh. You deciphered me and now I am plain to read. The message is a simple one; my love for you. I want you to live. Forgive my mistakes. Forgive me.*

He thinks of Will so often that it embarrasses him. How he would like to see the threading of his tissues, the striated muscle of his heart. At night, he thinks of the heat of his brain and wants to kill him for what he has done. Dreams of a stomach pulled open. A camera-flare of light. Then the blinding light of his mouth. Opened wide. Open wide. Let me see your teeth.

“Dr Lecter?”

Will is flushed and wrapped in an assortment of warm clothes: dull green scarf; a good-quality jacket that looks warm and soft; heavy leather boots. Attractively masculine. Glasses skewered and fogged.

Hannibal smiles and presses close to him, stepping out of the way of those pushing past. Will mumbles something about the cold and reaches up to push his hair from his eyes, his hands pink from the cold.

“Hello Will. I hope you're feeling better.”

Will shrugs, probably not feeling better. Still, he doesn't mention it, and looks over his shoulder to Hannibal as he begins to navigate through the busy street. “Where are we going today?” He asks.

“I thought we could walk through the markets. There are many here to choose from, but I think I know of some that you would enjoy.” He joins Will and steps into his rhythm, easily mimicking his footsteps. “The evening light creates an unusual aesthetic that is impossible to replicate: the sunset pools into the streets, the harsh clarity of the daylight softens. Especially in winter, when the light falls soon and fast, there is a beauty to be found.”

Will looks up at him and then back into the street. He nods. “Too much light to see any stars,” he says. “At home, everything is very clear and bright. Orion and Andromeda, above the horizon, the light of the city unable to reach us. When I first moved here, after years of cities,

the light and the noise and people, it astounded me. It had been a long time since I saw a sky so bright. I felt young again, like a child. Childish and awed."

"You must show me sometime," Hannibal says, tilting back his head to look at the sky, clear and bright. "Andromeda was punished for the hubris of her mother, condemned to sacrifice for a sin she did not commit. Like Tantalus, eternally starved, and Salmoneus, struck down by Zeus, our pride has been punished, met with a damning reminder of human mortality."

"Arachne. Odysseus. At least it was their own."

Hannibal thinks back to Will, seizing on his chair. Walking the fields of his home. Slicked up with horror. "Do you feel punished, Will?"

"No," he says. "I worry that someone else will take it for me."

Hannibal guides him through the busy streets with Will's eyes on the back of his neck. He preens in the attention. Quickly, the sunlight begins to fade, and the sky splits into color. Flesh-coloured blush. A cavern of light. The moon emerges from the sea-spray of clouds and shimmers, full and round, with a celestial glow.

"I have a coat I must pick up while we are here, Will. Please forgive me for my hidden motives."

Will laughs at him. "Of course." He follows Hannibal into the store, a shadowed, quiet thing, lit by warm light by the doorway. "I'm not even going to look at prices," he says. "I bet they don't even show them. I know it."

They are both pink from the cold, and it deepens in the sudden heat. Hannibal leads Will through the few people inside and to the desk by the back of the shop.

Mrs Galloway emerges from behind the counter. "Hannibal," she cries, her dark hair short around her shoulders now. She is around the same age as he is, with smile lines around her eyes, shallow creases in her cheeks, and she looks beautiful and lovely in the warm light. "You are here for your coat, aren't you?"

She shuffles through the papers on her desk until she finds his, holding it up to the light. "I won't be a moment," she assures, disappearing to somewhere else in the shop.

Behind him, Will shifts on his feet. He brushes his fingers on the material of a jacket near him, deep brown, lined with fur, and runs his hands inside, searching for a tag. When he finds one, he looks up to smile at Hannibal, pleased with himself. "Knew it," he laughs, the sound reverberating inside Hannibal's chest.

Hannibal reaches over to grab the hanger, wooden and stiff, and holds the coat to the light. It is warm and soft, thick and well made, the stitching expert, the seams precise. It is not what Hannibal would buy for himself, but it is for Will.

“Try it on,” he urges, insistent and pleased. Will frowns but takes the coat from him, giving him a skeptical look.

“Why?”

“I think it would suit you,” Hannibal says simply. “Mrs Galloway will be some time.” There is a mirror on the wall, tall and wide, and Hannibal guides Will towards it. He looks into the reflection and meets Will's eyes, who is watching him carefully.

“You know I'm not going to buy it,” he says flatly, but begins to pull off his jacket. It pools on the stool beside him, and his pockets click against the floor: car keys, lighter, loose change. A stray cigarette rolls out onto the floor. Hannibal blinks at it, slowly. He looks back into the mirror.

“No harm in pretending, Will.”

Will shrugs it over his shoulders and begins to button it up, fingers faster and deft. When he's done, he tilts his head in the mirror and looks up to catch Hannibal's eyes. He makes a face of humored, mocking approval, corners of his lips pulled down and eyebrows raised. “It's nice,” he offers, twisting to look at the sides.

“It is,” Hannibal agrees, stepping closer, so that he can smell the shampoo in Will's hair, artificial and sweet. He slides his hands down Will's shoulders to rest above his elbows, contemplative. “Perhaps a little loose here.”

“How unfortunate,” Will says. He can tell Will is impressed by it, the smooth glide of the fabric, the intricacy in the pattern, but is scathing of even the suggestion of the price. It is unnecessary, and unneeded, and Will is a practical man. So is Hannibal, in different ways.

He hears the rustle of fabric, the sound of a box being packed, and slides his arm up to Will's buttons, slowly beginning to undo them. Will jolts slightly in surprise, but does not stop him, and by the time Hannibal is done he is quiet and malleable. “You like it,” he says quietly into Will's ear, nose brushing his hair.

He breathes in slowly, a sighing exhale, and nods. “Yes,” he says, as quiet as Hannibal.

He runs his fingertips over the collar to dip into the heat of Will's neck, where it smoothes into his bulging spine. They are quiet for a moment, both unwilling to break the strange desire that has settled, unspoken and unusual, and Will does not meet his eyes again in the mirror.

Then, “You should quit smoking,” Hannibal says, glancing to the cigarette that has escaped from his pocket. Will follows the movement, and swears under his breath.

“I should,” he agrees, in a tone Hannibal knows means that he won't. He exhales, and there is smoke in his breath, dusky and bitter.

Hannibal rubs his fingers against the heat of Will's neck, fingertips sliding to his front, outlining the sharp line of his collarbone. “Will you?”

Will follows the movement of Hannibal's fingertips in the mirror, pupils blown and slow. He keeps his thumb on his left hand on Will's left collarbone, and slides his fingers onto the right, his throat fitting into the shape between Hannibal's thumb and first finger.

“For you?” He breathes. Mrs Galloway's voice calls from the other side of the shop, becoming closer, asking for him.

“Yes.” Hannibal leans forward, pressing his nose into Will's neck, where there is a rabbit fast pulse there, brittle and darting. He inhales deeply, closing his eyes, and strokes his thumb against the side of Will's neck. He swallows. Hannibal feels the movement.

“I can taste it on you,” Hannibal says, lips brushing against the fevered skin.

Chapter End Notes

The book is ‘written on the body,’ by Jeanette Winterson, who is a wonderful writer. I can't recommend her, and the book, enough.

I also hope this doesn't feel too rushed. I feel like I am a poor judge of pacing when I write...and I know nothing about Baltimore at all, so I don't know why I keep setting scenes there lol.

when the preacher talks, that man demands his silence

Chapter Summary

Fleabag: Hannibal version

Chapter Notes

ok I do have a few things to say in my notes today...
I'm so sorry this has taken so long to post—& it's quite short...I have exams at the moment & I haven't had much time or energy to write, but hopefully when they are over it can become easier!
I've also ended up rewriting this chapter soooo many times, it's been strangely difficult. This & the next chapter were going to be all in one, but I thought it would end up being too long, and it would take me even longer to post it, so I decided to split it up.
Because of this I am worried that this chapter is a bit boring or unsubstantial, but there if definitely going to be much more exciting things happening in the next! Which hopefully won't take me quite as long to write lol!

Thank you for sticking with me. And for all of your comments. They do mean the world to me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Winter is swathed in childhood and he lingers in the affliction. Here is the ice-cracked ground, the wind-swept skin, fingers numbing one by one. Here is the body of himself, the one he left behind. Here is the heart. The lungs. The markings upon the fingers.

Every morning, the sun rises. The curtains writhe. He drinks his coffee at the kitchen table and it becomes a tomb. Every morning, the sun rises and the sunlight punches through the windows and saturates the room in white. He dresses. Dissects himself.

By afternoon, the streets are still frozen, and the feeling remains. Childhood has divided into something uncontrollable, becoming cancerous, a tumor for each year. The memories duplicate without reason, lodging in his throat. The DNA has been damaged, and his grief is metastatic. Here is the esophagus, thick with loss. Here is the graveyard of a mouth.

He is bored with mediocrity. His patients cannot soothe the itch for something extraordinary. When Will is standing before him, pacing the room, running his hands over everything as if

to always leave his impression behind, he bathes in his excellence.

“I feel like a wound,” Will says. “A laceration. Always being reopened, unable to heal.”

Hannibal watches the tension in his jaw, how it flinches and moves. “Do you know how blood clots, Will? How it protects the wound beneath?”

He shakes his head, eyes flitting across Hannibal's hair.

“An accumulation of processes, wherein the activation of enzymes—prothrombin to thrombin—allows the creation of fibrin, protein fibers that form the mesh over the wound. Thus forming the blood clot, and the barrier between yourself and infection, disease.’

Will waits for him to continue with his hands folded in front of him, thumb rubbing across his knuckles. ‘Throughout, calcium–or rather, ions–are required to regulate the cascade of clotting factors. For your muscles to contract, they change the shape of the muscle fibers, allowing them to slide past one another.’ He inclines his head. ‘You can detect cancer through calcification in the breasts.’

‘You want me to have more dairy?’ Will asks, head tilted quizzically and sarcastic.

‘I want you to survive, Will. Deterioration is not sustainable.’ He crosses his legs, leaning back into his chair. ‘This life you have created for yourself, it is thick with illusion and deceit. You cannot manage it without bleeding onto others, without allowing them to relieve you of the blood.’

‘I don't want to share my wound.’

“You cannot bear giving yourself to anybody else,” Hannibal says.

Will frowns at him, and he sits back down in his chair. ‘There is nothing to give,’ he says. ‘I don't know what self there is for me to share.’

‘There are many. You resist categorization, and the result is extraordinary.’

“Unstable,” Will deflects. ‘Evanescent.”

“Has anybody understood you, Will? Unconditionally, without expectation? Have they looked beyond the skin, the film across the eyes, and seen what lies beneath? Held it up to the light, for it to catch between the fingerprints, the imprint of the life that has molded you?”

“It is a childish desire,’ Will says. ‘Understanding is oxymoronic to romance, but what of love? Love is to step inside someone and to be frightened by what you see. To desire them regardless. For their horror to be yours, and your fear theirs…”

‘Do you think yourself unlovable, if they were to see what is inside?’

‘I don’t want anyone to see inside.’

“What of love?’ He echoes, watching him intensely. “Don't you crave it?”

Will meets his eyes, the darkened beds, and his eyelashes fan onto his cheeks. The effect is peculiar and unnatural. ‘Do you?’

‘I am content with what I have,’ Hannibal says.

‘Contentment is not synonymous to satisfaction. Do you want more?’

‘I do not often find myself without what I want.’

Will pauses, his lips opening in response before he stops himself. ‘I don’t know what I want,’ he admits. ‘Not anymore.’

‘Why don’t we begin with when you were young?’ Hannibal says. ‘As children we want love, compassion, a safe home. Someone to play with, to feed from, to be introduced to the world with. As teenagers, on the cusp of adulthood, our desires begin to take shape into something unique to ourselves, which will steer us away from the familiarity of our parents and to somewhere unknown. The unprecedented climate is exciting. We hunger for change.”

Will is quiet for some time, contemplative. “I was always an unusual child. I was similar to my father in ways we didn’t want to admit,’ Will says, ‘Reclusive. I was obsessed with solitude. It was difficult to be around other people.” He shakes his head; a soft, awkward laugh. “I remember when I began to slip into consciousness, when the world began to lose the saturated color of childhood. I was unfit for youth. There was no guiding hand to steer me, so I had to follow my own.’

“What were you searching for?”

“Normal things,” Will says. ‘Someone to go to the mall with.’ He scoffs at himself, a cynical smile on his lips. “For a time, I was how all teenagers are: desperate to fit in, to find someone who could truly understand me.”

“What changed?”

“Circumstances. We never stayed anywhere long enough to form a stable relationship with anyone—even friendship. It was hard to keep in touch, back then.”

“Were you jealous?” Hannibal asks.

“Extremely,” Will says. “I couldn't stand myself. I wore myself like an ill-fitting suit, unable to align my mind with my body. The years passed. I experienced everything in hindsight, never completely present in the moment.”

“It sounds dissociative,” Hannibal remarks.

“Perhaps.” Will shrugs. He leans forward, suddenly. “I was not a happy child,” he says, conspiratorial and low as though telling a secret, so quiet it is almost a whisper. He meets Hannibal's eyes, then looks back at his shoulder, resting his elbows on his knees.

“Tell me a memory that is significant to you. It is often the inconsequential and mundane that remain with us, an insistent reminder of who we were, how we survived.”

Will frowns as he searches for a memory. “I grew up around the church, as you know,” he begins, hesitantly. “I was fourteen, and beginning to grow into myself. It was very hot—one of the hottest, I think. We couldn't leave the house. One of my shoes melted. I used my wardrobe as a confessional box. I remember sitting there one afternoon, the curtains drawn, in silence, suddenly unable to speak. My daddy thought I had gone mute. I still don't know why it happened.”

“What were you confessing, Will?” Hannibal asks, intrigued.

Will's lips twitch. “You're not my priest, Doctor.”

“I could be,” Hannibal says. “Is therapy not another form of confession?”

Will watches him for a long time, his eyes flitting rapidly across Hannibal's face, the light in his hair, the slight silvering there. With a strange expression on his face—implacable, shifting too quickly for interpretation—he moves to stand in front of Hannibal, almost between his spread legs.

“Come,” he says. “Be my priest.”

He walks backwards until he is halfways between their chairs, then spins around, and sits cross legged with his back towards Hannibal. “Sit with me. Behind me. Facing away from me.”

He looks back over his shoulder and stares expectantly. Hannibal moves without himself, folding himself behind Will. Their backs do not touch, but it is close, and he suppresses the desire to lean backwards to put his head on Will's shoulder, to press his face into his neck.

“Close your eyes, Will,” he says, low and quiet. “I want you to imagine yourself in your room. The heat of it. You can hear your father outside. The grass is dry and pale; the sun is fierce. You are young and innocent, but obsessed with guilt, sick with guilt. Breathe the familiarity. Feel the God of your childhood in the room with us.”

He can hear Will's breath, slow and deep, smell the lingering sickness, and beneath a spiking of anticipation. “Bless me, Father,” he says, at last. “For I have sinned.”

Desire sparks in Hannibal's stomach. He closes his eyes to the soft sound of Will's voice, his hushed breath. “It has been seven years since my last confession. These are my sins.”

Hannibal waits for him to continue, resisting against opening his eyes. Instead, he allows himself to sink into the memory, to create a room for it in his memory palace: Will, his hair dark and long, curling from the heat. Sweat beading on his lip, dressed in shorts, a t-shirt—or rather, not much at all. Underwear. Bruised shin bones. Scars on his knees. Bated breath for a response that will never arrive, speaking to a God that he does not understand. Forgive me, Father. Forgive me.

Tell me of your sins. Speak clearly. Let me hear your voice. The Father of mercies. Forgive me. Forgive me.

“I have been gluttonous, Father. I have taken what is not mine,” Will says. “My hands are not my own. This body—Forgive me. I do not feel like myself.”

He listens to the sharp intake of breath, the aborted gasp. “I have killed, Father. It frightens me that I will do it again. Still, it was powerful, absolute. These desires are all my own. I dream of sickness. And of wrath. I buried my father but I carry his anger with me, like a soul beyond my own. Tell me, Father, how to forgive.”

“There is more,” Hannibal says, “Do not be afraid to confess.”

“I am afraid,” Will begins, “That this is all that I am.”

“What are you?”

“Unstable,” be repeats, as from before. “Evanescent. I fear I will be split apart and found unforgivable.”

“No sin is without forgiveness. Tell me,” Hannibal says, “What is inside?”

Will breathes in deeply, and Hannibal with him. Their chests fall at the same time. “I am sickened with desire,” he confesses. “When they open me up they will find something wrong the heart. The meat will be poisoned by hunger.”

Hannibal catches his breath in his throat, swallows down the pulse in his throat. “What do you desire?” He asks.

“I cannot tell. My thoughts are entangled with one another, and I can no longer tell them apart. I am unsure which obsessions are my own.”

“How does it make you feel?”

“Frightened,” Will says. “I don't know what is real and what is not. The truths of reality have eluded me, and now I do not know where to look.”

“This is real, Will,” Hannibal breathes. “I can feel you, hear your voice, smell your sweetness. Am I real for you, Will?”

Will does not answer. Instead, he shifts backward, so that his back presses against Hannibal's. His spine presses into his own. He tilts back his head to rest it on Hannibal's shoulder, his eyes still closed, his skin burning feverish and hot.

“Yes,” he says, almost a whisper. “You are real. Forgive me. Forgive me,” he pleas.

Hannibal does not sleep, that night. His thoughts adopt a dream-like quality that blurs the edges of his vision, desires sliding past one another, sensations softened by a surreal haze.

Will had not lingered, afterwards. His legs unfolding, not touching Hannibal long enough for him to do anything but breathe in his fevered scent, watch the fluttering of his eyelids.

Hannibal followed him, watching him pull on his jacket as he spoke.

“God, the Father of mercies,” Hannibal said, lingering on the curve of Will's jaw, the way he balanced his weight heavier on his left side. He followed him to the door, his voice strong and sensual. “Through the death and the resurrection of His Son has reconciled the world to Himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Will had smiled at him, small and sweet. His hair fell around his neck. “Amen,” he said, raising a hand to his forehead, his chest, left then right. “Thank you for listening—” He looked up through his lashes, eyes bright and young. “—Father.”

Hannibal watched him go, seized with the ache for something violent. He imagined following him out onto the stairs, a needle in hand. A Bible in hand. Holiness lighting up his skin. He would stiffen, his skin becoming damp and bruised.

He crosses his arms over his stomach and feels the rise and fall of his chest, counts them, wonders if he could align Will to himself in this way. Here, breathe as I do. Eat as I do. Feel the thudding of your heart and know that mine is the same.

Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights; the accumulations of a lifetime gather there.

Will calls him late that week. “Unprofessional, Doctor,” he says in lieu of greeting, frustrated and short.

Hannibal pauses in his kitchen, one hand smoothing across the liver on the workbench. “It was not only I who breached the threshold, Will. Or do you blame me for your actions?”

“Don't condescend me,” he says. “You're presumptuous.”

“Is that what I am?”

“Absolutely,” Will snaps. He sighs through the speaker. “I can't accept it.”

“You must,” Hannibal says, “It would please me greatly.”

“You're pushing my boundaries.”

Hannibal traces his fingertips across the warming meat before him, his phone on speaker beside. “You allow them to be pushed.”

“It's unfair.”

“Yes,” Hannibal agrees.

Will is quiet. The telephone crackles, slightly, as though he has moved.

“How can I make you forgive me?” Hannibal asks. He drags two fingers down the middle of the liver and then one up the center, repeats the motion, until his fingertips stain pink and pure.

“Cook for me,” Will says, after a long pause. “Tonight.”

Hannibal smiles at the phone and begins rearranging his plans in his mind. “Of course,” he says. “Can I come to you?”

“Yes.”

“Wonderful,” he says, making no move to end the call when Will does not reply. He pauses with his palm flat on the liver, resisting the urge to dig his fingers into the soft meat. Longing snakes inside of him.

“Will you wear it?” Hannibal asks.

Will hangs up.

“I'm terribly sorry, Jack,” Hannibal sighs into his phone, while packing his cool bag. “A patient of mine has become extremely distressed, and I worry for their safety. Allow me to rearrange our evening.”

“It's alright, Doctor,” Jack says. “I understand your concern. Please, don't worry. Dinners can be postponed; lives cannot.”

“I hope you have a wonderful evening regardless, Agent Crawford. I was hoping to talk to you about some small matters, but they can wait.”

“Come to the Bureau,” Jack says. “I'm happy to discuss any issues there. Nothing too pressing, I hope?”

Hannibal finishes packing the bag and slides ice backs down the sides, pressing everything tight and neat. “Nothing to concern yourself about tonight,” he assures. “But I must go. We must arrange another evening.”

“Goodbye, Hannibal,” Jack says.

Hannibal grabs his keys. A strange giddiness bubbles in his stomach.

During the drive, the sky begins to darken: passionate red fading into violet, purple and bruised, against a moon that is bright and clear. His thoughts overturn one another. The roads are quiet and long.

He watches the moonlight puddle on the leather seats and revisits Will in his memory palace, exploring the rooms that twist inside his mind. Here is the foyer. The cathedral of your body.

Show me the stained glass of your eyes, the foundations of your skull. Bear yourself: your passageways and your walls, the steeping roof of your mouth. Bless me, for I have sinned. Allow me to do it again.

Chapter End Notes

I was absolutely imagining Mads Mikkelsen dressed like a priest in this. I watched Fleabag & never recovered.

I'm a little worried this is beginning to seem a bit repetitive or like it's not going anywhere...I promise I do have a (kind of) plot! It's just taking me so much longer to get there than I thought it would! I really want to start writing the other characters into this, & I do have plans to, I promise.

I find difficulty with consistency when writing—I must be in a very specific mood to write anything worth keeping, which is why it tends to take me a while to update...I also used to really avoid writing dialogue because I found it really difficult & now I can't seem to make them shut up.

Final thing: please forgive me for any mistakes in the biology. It was just from my memory & i'm too lazy to properly fact check...

Thank you for reading as always!

there lies my passion hidden

Chapter Summary

a dinner date, etc.

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody, I'm so sorry this has taken so long...this past month has been busy & January has had me—I've been awfully uninspired. I rewrote and rewrote scenes in this chapter so many times. Still—I hope you like this one, and thank you for waiting.

Much love as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is waiting for him when he arrives.

It is night now, and the sky is black. Proud Orion walking the lengths of the universe, from moon to moon. A precise and silent stillness paralyzes the minutes into obscurity, time barely passing at all. He kills his engine and gets out of his car

In Will's house, the lights are on, squares of yellow lighting up the porch. His silhouette slips in and out of view as he crosses from window to window, and Hannibal notices the exact moment when the dogs begin to bark, how he freezes, glancing out onto the fields.

“You're not wearing it,” Hannibal says as Will opens the door, almost dumbly.

Will raises his eyebrows and steps sideways to hold open the door, mockingly, hand gesturing into the warmth. “I haven't forgiven you yet,” he says, following Hannibal inside.

Inside, the house is warm and soft, with a few lit candles peppering the air with citrus and spice. He has been here before, of course, but allows Will to lead him through, nodding as though to commit it to memory.

“I won't apologize for my kitchen,” he says as Hannibal places his bag on the countertop. “It is yours that is ostentatious.”

“I wouldn't want you to.”

He begins to unpack the bag, spreading the ingredients out across the surface. There is a quaint comfort to Will's kitchen that is unmistakable: the walls an eggshell blue, the

cupboards pale yellow; a coffee machine, a microwave, a gas stove top, everything organized and neat. There is a strange assortment of objects on the windowsill: a few cacti, a little ceramic dog, letters, opened then resealed. On the table, a half-empty whisky bottle.

“You've been drinking,” he says, leaning closely to smell the faint whiskey on his breath.

“You think I'd have invited you over if I hadn't?” Will says, leaning against the countertop with his hands behind his back. He tilts his head curiously to the wrapped up ingredients, and his skin has a slight flustered glow from drinking. “What are we having?”

“Liver.” Hannibal pulls out a bottle of wine. “Should you have any more?”

Will laughs shortly. “I'm not even drunk,” he says. “I haven't drank since we spoke.”

Regardless, Hannibal would not object to his inebriation. Instead, there would be an opportunity to pry, to explore his house in the tangerine light of the lamps. The thought has an appeal he had not fully appreciated until now, seeing Will like this, dozy and calmer, his eyes sliding slowly in a tipsy haze.

“If you insist.” Hannibal pours them each a glass.

Will sips slowly, meeting Hannibal's eyes as if for emphasis. His lips leave a damp mark on the glass, a glossy imprint of his mouth on the rim.

“I'll be right back,” he says, setting down his glass. He dips into the room adjacent, and there is the sound of the door opening, of the dogs spilling into the garden. With him gone, Hannibal picks up his glass, holding it to the light to find the wetness at the top. He presses his lips to the mark left behind, almost a kiss, and imagines it is Will he can taste beneath.

“Has there been any developments in the case, Will?” He asks when Will is beside him again, watching closely to how he puts his lips over where Hannibal's were.

“No,” Will says shortly.

“You don't wish to discuss it?”

Will shakes his head. “It'll put me in a bad mood.”

Hannibal nods, content to be redirected. There is time, later, for him to pry. He has learned to be a patient man. “Would you like to help?” He asks.

Will raises his eyebrows. “You'll let me this time?” He looks over the ingredients—the liver unwrapped, a deep burgundy color, onions and carrots, garlic cloves to be split open. “What would you like me to do?”

“Cut the onions, please,” Hannibal says, pulling a knife from the block. They are sharp, old but of good quality, like most things of Will's. “Diced, if you will.”

Will hums and rests it on a chopping board, peeling off the skin. “I've been dreaming again,” he begins.

Hannibal glances over. Will's hands are steady around the knife, his movements sure and precise. “What of?”

“Many things,” he begins. “My father. My mother, how I would imagine her to be.”

“What was she like?”

Will is quiet, his hands going still. “I think she would be like me,” he begins. “My dad didn't talk about her but once he said I looked like her. Same eyes. Something like that.”

“She must have been a very beautiful woman,” Hannibal says, feeling like an inexperienced teenager, stumbling his way through a crush, a hesitant first love.

Will looks at him, eyes widened and bright. He looks heartbroken for a short moment as though Hannibal has said something cruel, and from it something sharp and demanding tugs in his chest. “I think she was,” Will says quietly. He looks back down and continues dicing the onions, his hands slightly slower than before, a little less sure.

“Do you know her name?” Hannibal asks.

“No. My dad never told me.”

“You could find out, if you wanted to.”

“I know,” Will says, shaking his head. “I don't want to.” He turns the onion around so that it cuts easier, dragging his knife along the board. “I couldn't do it.”

“We always live in the wombs of our mothers, even after birth. Especially, after birth.” Hannibal says, finally. He begins to slice the liver and it warms beneath his hands, supple and wet. “Motherhood is as cruel as it is glorious. We make her bleed and she loves us, still. When she gives herself, we are greedy and selfish, as though starving for love.”

“Tell me about your mother,’ Will asks.

“She was Italian,” Hannibal begins. “And very kind. Her hair was very dark—almost black; I remember how her face would light up at night, like the moon, haloed by the darkness of her hair. She was magical, to me, something otherworldly. I cannot think of her except for with fondness.”

Will watches him closely, the feel of his gaze burning and strong. “I'm sorry that you lost her,” he says, and although Hannibal normally dislikes the false sympathy he finds something genuine in Will. He looks at him, and his skin is buttery and soft. His lips are wet. One collar bone protruding from beneath his shirt.

“Thank you, Will,” Hannibal says. He does not say “I'm sorry about yours; I'm sorry for what you never had,” because it would be untrue. It has brought Will here, and he is beautiful. There will be no other the same.

Instead he turns his hands back to the liver, finishes cutting it, and fills a bowl with milk for it to soak in. “You told me family is an unfamiliar concept for you. It wasn't, when I was young, but the memories have begun to rust and stiffen; the framework of my childhood is losing itself. I find myself desperate for halls I have not walked down, for rooms I have not discovered, that will show the life that I am beginning to forget.”

“Are you religious?” Will asks.

Hannibal glances at him, and notices the way Will runs his fingertip along the blade of the knife. “I am not an atheist. If there is a God he is cruel beyond our conceptualisation; our imagination limits us to what we know and what we can dream, and I will not worship a God that punishes for recreation of his own sins.” he says, then adds, “Except for you. Your imagination is limitless. A pool that has no end, reflecting whoever searches for the bottom.”

“My imagination is not free from cruelty,” Will says. “You know what it can do.”

“Yes. And you shouldn't fear it. Even your cruelty would be something extraordinary, Will.” He walks behind Will to the sink and takes the opportunity to lean in closer to his neck, to breathe in the sickness beneath. “Are you religious?”

“My God is tenacious. I resent him for how I was raised, always beneath his grasp, the sure fingers of something better than what any of us could be. I was never committed but I carry his guilt. Sometimes, in my dreams, he takes the shape of my father.”

“Because you worshiped him?”

“Because I resented him,” he says. “And because I loved him. I cannot seem to feel one without the other. I don't think my love is anything kind.”

Hannibal allows the silence to sit. The electrical lights buzz and whirr. Will puts down his knife and drinks contently, his fingers wrapped loosely around the stem of his glass. “It was strange when he died,” Will begins. “I didn't think I would grieve as I did. It wasn't the thought of him gone as much as the things that only we knew. Nobody wants to hear about the time he sometimes made coffee with salt and not sugar. Or how he would only watch the football when it was raining outside. I'm going to forget and there will be no one left to remember.” He frowns at the dark sky beyond his dozy home. “I wish I had listened more. If there is an afterlife I hope there is someone for him to tell.”

Hannibal serves dinner on mismatched plates and a deep green table cloth.

Will lit the fire while Hannibal was setting the table, and now the flames burst bright and strong, the heat making his legs tingle with warmth. A candle burns between them, cinnamon and sweet. Will eats slowly, his movements slightly loose from drinking, and he hums around his fork in appreciation.

“Do you talk to Jack about me?” He asks, suddenly.

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, his hand pausing. “Why do you ask?”

Will shrugs. “Curious,” he says. “Makes me feel a little bit like I'm in middle school.”

“Would you prefer for me to lie to Jack?”

“No, no,” Will says. “I don't want you to speak to him about me at all.”

“Why is that?”

“It makes me feel like he's always here with us, listening in. I feel fucked over.”

“Would you prefer it if we were alone?” Hannibal asks.

“Yes,” Will agrees, glancing up to meet Hannibal's eyes. “Wouldn't you?”

“I do not tell him all that you allow me,” he says, avoiding the question. “Rather I tell him my concerns about your work and he disregards them.”

“You can't make me quit.”

“No. But I wish you would consider how it harms you.”

“It gives me purpose.”

“I think you have a complex, Will,” Hannibal says, and Will barks out a laugh, sharp and rough.

“I think I have a few.” He brings a slice of liver to his lips and chews thoughtfully, his fork poised in the air. “Do you talk to Alana about me?”

“Occasionally,” Hannibal admits. “Although she tends to dutifully avoid the topic of you when she can.”

“Good,” Will says. “What do you talk about?”

Hannibal rests his fork on his place, looking at Will with a concern to hide the pleasure beneath. “Will. You sound paranoid. Has something happened?”

“Paranoid?” He scoffs. “I'm just curious. Wouldn't you like to know, if you were me?”

“Alana is concerned about your relationship.”

Will grimaces, his lips curving down. “There's no relationship to be concerned about,” he says, before he spears another piece of liver. “This is delicious,” he adds.

Hannibal smiles at him over the top of his glass. They are quiet for the rest of the meal.

Will begins slipping after they've eaten, standing side by side at the sink. He repeats movements, reaching for plates that aren't there, closing a cupboard just to open it again, closing it, then reaching for a glass he has already dried. Hannibal watches curiously, observing quietly as Will becomes more disorientated, and not from drinking. Rubbing his head, he swallows two aspirin dry.

"Would you like dessert?" Hannibal asks.

Will nods, smiling, and sits on one of the stools by the kitchen table. "What is it? He rests his elbows on the table and rests his chin on his palms.

"A surprise," Hannibal says, to which Will rolls his eyes.

He watches as Hannibal sets a pan of water on the stop, lighting it and waiting for it to boil. His skin is mellow and warm in the dusky light, beginning to be powdered by sweat, and when he moves Hannibal can almost imagine the thudding in head, the rhythmatic rush of blood in his ears.

Hannibal melts chocolate in a bowl over the water, one hand stirring, the other around his glass. Behind him, he can hear Will's slowing breathing, smell the sweetening scent of his discomfort.

"It's so hot in here," he says, fingertips pressing against his forehead. "I'm going to stand outside."

"Don't get too cold," Hannibal says, raising his eyebrows expectantly. "I think you may need a coat," he prompts.

Will narrows his eyes at him. He takes out a cigarette and on his way out of the door lights it on the lit gas burner beneath Hannibal's pan, wrist brushing Hannibal's own. He meets his eyes, smiles around the cigarette at Hannibal's displeasure, and leaves to stand on the porch.

Through the window, his figure is distorted with light. A bright ember that flares with each inhale—stars beyond, a moon like an orange slice, a citric stickiness of moonlight. Will rests his elbows on the wooden rail and ducks his head below his arms. Hannibal imagines the pricking of his skin in the cold, a cellular mountain range to run his fingertips across.

He begins to rewarm the cake as he pours in the cream, mixing until it becomes smooth and silky. The scent is strong and cloying, dark and sweet, and candle wax begins dripping onto the window sill.

Will doesn't come back in for some time, and the cake begins to cool.

They eat on the couch, Will smelling like cigarettes and sickness.

"Why did you move here?" Will asks. "To America. Where did you live before?"

“Opportunity,” Hannibal says. “A desire for reinvention.” He looks over to Will—the strong slope of his nose, the bruising beneath his eyes—and inclines his head towards him. “I lived in Florence before, and there are times I miss it. America is vast, and a vessel for opportunity. But time moves so quickly here it sometimes seems to not pass at all, each year the same, only distinguishable by being more apathetic than the last. Integration was strange and often difficult, but I enjoy my life here, and what I have created.”

“Land of the free,” Will says. “Do you think you will stay?”

“It will depend on circumstance, as will most of my future.”

Will looks at him curiously, an eyebrow arched. “What circumstances do you predict?”

“I cannot. Even with all my control it can't extend to the will of the universe, despite my efforts. The future is limitless, a bridge we cannot cross until we are forced, and until then there is no way to see to the other side,” he says. “I am an indulgent man; fantasy is not above me, but I don't wish to disappoint myself with grandiose ideas of what the future will be.”

Will props his arm up on the back of the couch and rests his cheek on his forearm, twisting sideways to face Hannibal. “I don't know if that's depressing or not.”

“What do you see in your future, Will?” Hannibal asks.

“It's changing,” he admits. “A year ago I might have said this. My house. Dogs. Lecturing. Now I'm not so sure.”

“Why is that?”

“This doesn't feel sustainable anymore. I don't know how much longer I can do this.”

“Your job?” Hannibal asks.

“Yes. No. All of it.” He drops his arm back down to the seat of the couch and rests his cheek back against the bare back, face partly obscured by his hair. It is difficult to see his expression, with the light low and shifting, the candles snuffing out one by one. “How can I do this for the rest of my life? For another 5 years? I feel like I'm losing my mind.” He shakes his head, stares down at his hands, the glass empty on the floor.

“I want to offer you stability, Will,” Hannibal begins, “A respite from this. You know I care for you, that I wish to see you well. But you must allow me to help you, to calm what startles inside.”

“You're not doing it for me, Doctor,” Will says, impassionately, no bitterness between the vowels. Rather—a strange indifference. “I don't think you care for me much at all.”

Hannibal frowns, displeasure sparking inside. “That's not true,” he says, and is disconcerted to find that it is honest.

Will looks at his lazily, his movements lethargic and slow. He stares for a moment, his eyelids slipping half-closed and eyelashes fanning out across his cheeks, and when he opens them again they are cloudy but bright.

“That's not true, Will,” he repeats.

Will smiles at him. “It's alright,” he whispers, like a secret. “I understand.”

“I care for you, Will,” Hannibal says, almost urgently, shifting forward so that he can breathe in the air Will expels, the rotting dampness of his brain. “I do.”

“What does it feel like?”

“Poisonous. I can feel you in my blood.” Hannibal slips his palm between Will's cheek and the couch, the skin beneath warm and soft. “I can feel you here—” he traces his thumb across his cheekbones, dipping into the curve of his cheek before meeting the edge of his lips. “—and here.”

“Does it hurt?” Will breathes, his breath settling on Hannibal's thumb as he moves—across the bottom lip, up again, not quite touching the heat that radiates from within.

“Terribly. You must know what you do to me.”

Will tilts his head for his front teeth to graze the nail on Hannibal's thumb. “Tell me,” he says, low and hushed.

“You tempt me. You make me ache in places I am only discovering to exist.” He moves his thumb away from Will's mouth, his teeth, and up to his cheek again, stroking lightly against the bone. “Tell me you understand.”

“I do,” Will says, pressing his cheek into Hannibal's hand. He turns his head so that his lips press gently against the heel of his palm, mouthing his words into the skin. “I do.”

“Do you forgive me?”

Will smiles thinly against his hand, catching the skin lightly between his teeth. “Depends,” he says. “I don't want you to go yet.”

He slips out of Hannibal's touch, his movements fluid like oil. “I need another drink,” he says, glancing over his shoulder to where Hannibal still sits, the feeling of Will's skin burning brightly against his palm. His scent lingers. He follows Will into the black.

In the nocturnal glow of the kitchen, lit only by the light pulsing in through the open door, Will hunches over the counter with a bottle in hand. His hands are unsteady. Hannibal moves to stand behind him, watching the dark liquid slosh inside a glass.

“Would you like help?” He says, quietly over his shoulder, one hand hovering just beside Will's waist. He doesn't touch, but can feel the heat radiating from his skin like a star beyond

their own, a supernova.

“Don't look at me,” Will breathes, shifting forward. He presses the cuff of his shirt against a whisky spot on the counter, bowing his head, the back of his neck a plate of silver.

Leaning forward, his chest very close to Will's back—not not touching, not quite, his hand hovering over Will's waist before he rests it against the curve there, fingertips jumping as Will startles. He hears Will hold his breath, the sharp breath in, before he breathes out slowly, his weight pressing harder onto the counter. There will be bruises, he thinks, on the wings of Will's hip bones. He wants to bruise him everywhere all at once.

Instead, he reaches his other hand to press against the back of Will's neck, fingers brushing his hair away so that he can lean in closer, to smell the dampness, the lingering scent of rot. He finds the hem of Will's shirt and dips his fingers beneath, lifting it enough to press his palm against the bare skin of his side. It is warm beneath, feverish and prickling beneath Hannibal's cold fingers, and he inhales sharply at the feeling, nose ducking to rest behind Will's ear. “Is this what you want, Will?”

Fingernails slipping up to his bottom rib, protruding like the fringes of a mountain, he strokes his fingertip in the space between them. There is dampness, a slickness, like a lake formed from downpour. His breath fogs against Will's cheek.

“Yes,” Will says, though he remains still and tense, stomach flexing under Hannibal's touch, his breathing beginning to quicken. He shifts, trying to twist around to face Hannibal—and he lets him, hands slipping to rest on his hips.

This close, there is a scar on Will's brow bone. An eyelash on his cheek. Light slips into the wide-open eyes and lightens them to sea-foam. “What do you see?” He asks, staring at Hannibal with such intensity that he almost wishes to look away.

“Opportunity,” he says. “I am an indulgent man. Will you give me this?” He keeps his hands on Will's hips but dips one of his thumbs below the waistband on his pants, skating across the sharp jut of his hipbone.

Will squirms against him, eyes flitting very quickly across Hannibal's face, down to the bulges of his veins on his forearms. “What is there to give?”

“Everything. I want all that you have.”

Will sighs against him, his breath warm against Hannibal's lips. He shakes his head, a slow aborted movement. “That's too much. You don't know what you ask of me.”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal says, “But I have always wanted the world.”

Will smiles slightly, a hand reaching up to smooth along Hannibal's cheekbone, then resting his fingers around the back of his neck. “I don't know how to bear the weight of you,” he confesses.

It is sweet, tender. He holds his own confession in his teeth. He wants to whisper it, to mouth it into the silence, if only to see how Will would react. Kiss me, he thinks, and you might taste it in my mouth.

There is too much to say. A novel of secrets on his tongue. He slips a hand to Will's back and presses himself closer, so that their noses almost brush, and the feeling of Will's breath against his own makes him spark with want.

“Am I a clutch for balance, Will?” Hannibal asks, feeling around the bumps of Will's spine as he drags his fingers up and down, a calming motion, and unbecoming. He is twisting into someone unrecognizable and aches with the stretch of growth, skin bulging around what was once impossible.

Here in the lamplight, the candlelight, heat burning at his palms and stomach, he fills a space he has carved for himself in this quiet corner of the world. Will is quiet, and fervent, and when he moves his hand from Hannibal's neck his fingernails drag along the skin, darting to thread into his hair. He shakes his head, his hair shifting like leaves.

Hannibal, stricken by himself, his carelessness, drops his hands from Will's body. He tries to step backwards but the hand in his hair is strong, Will's other hand coming to press against his ribs. “No,” he whispers. “You can't leave me like this.”

Dipping his head away from Will's lips, Hannibal meets his eyes. “It is unethical, Will, and unfair. I will not take advantage of you like this.” It feels hollow as he says it, the words brittle as they fall to their feet.

“What am I like?”

“Traumatized,” Hannibal says, and Will's grip tightens. “Unstable. Evanescent. It would be cruel.”

Will stares at him before surging forward, though the kiss is surprisingly soft. Reflectively, Hannibal's hands move to rest again at Will's hips, and for a moment he allows himself to step into the moment: Will's lips, warm and insistent, his hands aching and true. He parts his lips in surprise, and Will takes his lower lip between his own. He pulls back, lost to himself, his fingertips bruising against Will's muscle.

Sharing his breath, Will is hazy and unraveling. He smiles sadly and pulls Hannibal closer, slotting their legs together.

“I don't feel traumatized,” he gasps, into Hannibal's open mouth. “I feel ruined.”

Chapter End Notes

One of the symptoms of encephalitis—like many brain diseases/ disorders—is paranoia, & I fully intend to manipulate this (& Will!). Neurological disease fascinates me. I love

neuroscience.

The last line of this was actually one of the first I wrote for the whole thing. I've been waiting to put it in somewhere

But thank you for reading, & sorry for the wait!

the accumulations of a lifetime gather there

Chapter Notes

> I've been really slow at replying to comments recently, but I promise that I do cherish every single one!! You really make my day!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It has been a while since we last spoke,” Bedelia says, one leg crossed over the other. She is poised—blonde hair slick and curled, her face a desert landscape: here, a tumbleweed of emotion, an empty bar with the lone patron trickling out of her mouth.

“It has,” Hannibal agrees. “My schedule has recently become muddied by opportunity and obligation.”

“Your work for the FBI?”

“In part. It is strange to be part of something that is normally so separate from everyday life—except for what is shown on the television, or on the radio, it is rare to see the inner workings of the FBI so closely. It is fulfilling.”

“Are you still recovering from your attack?”

“It was disconcerting,” Hannibal says, “For the first week. To speak of healing at the place where such violence occurred, to where a body lay, its outline I can almost still see.”

“Does it not dissuade you from the FBI?” Bedelia asks. “Was it not your involvement with Will Graham that led to the violence you experienced?”

“I place no blame on Will Graham. I hold more guilt over the danger my words led him to. There was a moment, after Tobias told me of the agents he killed, that I had the terrible and acute thought that Will was one of them. It was alarming, the sharpness of the distress the idea caused. It has been some time since I last cared for another.”

“It seems that Will Graham is part of the obligation that has you occupied.” She presses her lips together, a strong flat line like the horizon that peeks just beyond her head. Sunset. Friday evening. A slow and laborious descent into the end of the year.

He tilts his head. “I am not obligated to Will Graham.”

“Aren't you?” She says, meeting his gaze with sharp and stealing eyes. Wide-open. Curious. “What word would you use instead, for someone who you cook for, dine and pay for, who you keep in your office far past his hour? I wonder to where your interest extends to, Hannibal—and it it will end at all.”

“Will is my friend, and my patient. We have spoken before about this.”

“Yes,” she agrees, “And yet you have refused to disengage yourself. The needs you cannot meet as his therapist should not be met through friendship. When he confides in you, does he do so as a friend or a patient? Are you comfortable knowing the answer?”

Hannibal crosses a leg over the other. The gaping maw of the sun slipping downwards, now spitting useless light. “He is not my patient in any official capacity; our conversations no longer strain under the weight of professionalism.”

“And yet you see him twice a week, at an allocated time, in an allocated place. You sit opposite one another, much like how we do now. He tells you he has trouble sleeping, and you consider prescribing him amitriptyline, before deciding you prefer his wit. Afterwards, he eats at your table, your forks in his mouth, his lips on your glasses.” She bores into him, dissects—precisely but shallowly, only teasing at the give of his seams. “He tells you he has trouble sleeping and you want to invite him to stay. How do you choose which answer to give, between friend and psychiatrist?”

“Must I? Is there not a balance to be found?” He says. “Which is it that you give, Bedelia?”

“I have told you before, Hannibal, I am not your friend.” She tilts her head, hair shifting past her shoulder. “What we have together is unlike what you have with Will Graham.”

“We have secrets, shared memories we cannot bear outside of this room. When you confide in me, Bedelia, do you do so as my doctor or my confidant? Dare I remind you of the wound we share?”

She regards him for a long moment. “Defensiveness is rare for you Hannibal. So little do you spar with me like this. You deny your involvement with Will Graham with such vehemence that it becomes ironic.”

“Perhaps if you were to meet him you would understand.”

She cocks her head. “His reputation is not favorable, but I trust that you can see beyond it. What is that he shows you?”

Hannibal thinks of needle-marks and bruised eye sockets. “Opportunity,” he says instead. “Even with my knowledge of who he is he surprises me; his empathy works in such ways I could not conceive of were he not the proof of it. As his psychiatrist, he is interesting, a puzzle to be understood. As his friend, his self is paramount.”

“In what way?”

“He can be funny, both when he tries and when he doesn't.” He searches fondly for late nights at his office, shared breath—then driving home, the light of Will's car shining in his mirrors, the light of Will flooding the roads in white. “He is perceptive—startlingly so—and confessional at times, occasionally uncomfortably honest. Our hobbies are different, our tastes polarizing, but it is inconsequential, and welcomed. I feel he has the indulgent and dangerous ability to understand me very well.”

“You are confident in him. It is rare for you,” she says, “To hold someone in such high regard. Especially concerning yourself in this way. But if he were to ask you to disentangle yourself, would you be capable of doing it?”

“Will understands that I support him. I see no reason why he would.”

“He may become uncomfortable by your intensity.”

Hannibal taps his fingers against the arm of the chair. “It is one we share,” he says.

Bedelia raises her eyebrows, lips twitching once before settling again. “Is it?” She says, “Has something happened, Hannibal?”

He meets her stare, unfazed. “There are lines of professionalism I will not cross, Bedelia.”

“Yet you have a habit of redrawing them,” she says. “What would you do if he were to step over it himself? Would you be able to step away, or would you join him on the other side?”

Outside, the sun slinks behind the window, shadows creeping up the walls. A dove on the phone-line, singing the sound of love.

*

Saturday evening. November drawing thin. There is an unusually harsh cold snap: warnings of snow on the radio; talk of road-clearing; a brochure posted through his letter box about the deadened lawns. Last Monday evening, while attending the Neighbours Associate's weekly meeting that he has not been to since spring, a woman with bleach-blonde hair and a miniscule gap between her front teeth said, “I'm having a company come round to insulate my pipes. I heard on the radio the cold can make them burst,” then, “Who is that man I've seen you with? Dark hair. Glasses sometimes. Drives that old Volvo.”

“He is my dear friend,” he said, hoping she does not read TattleCrime.com. “Why do you ask?”

“Curiosity. You've not had any of us around for weeks, and yet—most Thursdays, sometimes Tuesdays—I see him leave your house and drive away.”

“Should I be worried you keep such a watchful eye?”

She smiled, her dark-rimmed eyes crinkling. There were small flecks of mascara dotting the underside of her eyelashes, a small smudge of pink lipstick on the edge of her mouth. Beyond her, balding and sweaty, still in his suit from his day-job, her husband talked to the other husbands in the group with insincere promises of beer and barbeques come summer—the electric kinds, not the ones one must manually light.

“I get awful bored sometimes. Here the windows are so large and tempting.” She adjusted her hair, stiff with hairspray. “But I shouldn't complain. John works enough for us both.”

Hannibal thought of her standing by the kitchen window, washing dishes again, cleaning the floors again, waiting for her husband to arrive home with the smell of plastic and boredom.

“I don't know how you do it, Hannibal,” she said, “All alone in that big home of yours. Don't you get lonely? I'm sure there are plenty women to be your wife.”

“I am content with what I have,” he said, thinking of Will, again.

She leaned in closer, the floral scent of her perfume strong and sweet, and placed a gentle hand on his elbow. “You don't want to give people the wrong impression, is all, especially with this friend of yours,” she said, her nails cornflower blue against his dark suit; they were neat except for slight chippings on the end and, like the slight doped-out look in her eyes, the proof of the labor she works. “Not that I mind about that sort of thing but—”making an aborted movement with her head to indicate to the men behind her, “—a lot of people around here do.”

“I'll bear it in mind, Alexandra, thank you,” he said, surprised to find it is honest.

“I love it how you say my name.” She looked back at her husband, his suit pulled tight around his shoulders, neck bulging and threaded with purple. “John never calls me by that anymore.”

“What does he call you?”

She looked back to him, a sad smile lifting up her lips. “Nothing nice,” she said, and her husband turned back around; an open arm, his watch shiny and new, the slicked-back gleam of his hair. He hooked his arm around her waist and gave Hannibal a look that suggested what Alexandra had spoken: small eyes searching for abnormality, something to give away the sickness inside.

Down in the halls of Quantico, shoes clicking against the floor, he catches sight of Will leaving his classroom. Bag slung across his shoulder and disposable cup in hand, shadows beneath his eyes so deep they seem like bruises. He's looking down at the floor and avoiding the attention of his students, still lingering outside, and disappears into the crowd before Hannibal can catch him.

To say what? Forgive me. Kiss me again. There are things I never said. Kiss me. I adore you, still.

“What is it you wanted to discuss?” Jack says, handsome and authoritative behind his desk. He is two days unshaved and his chin is stubbled in silver, a patch of close-cropped hair disappearing into his neck.

“Only Will,” Hannibal says, crossing one leg over the other. He smooths his hands down on his pants and thinks of Will that night: eyes half-closed and accusing; head thrown back, the pale slope of his neck; the pulse beneath, rabbit fast beneath Hannibal's gentle mouth; Will standing in his kitchen, slinking into the darkness. Will not following him to the door. Will leaving him desolate and aching.

“Is something wrong?” Jack asks, suddenly alert. He leans forwards, forearms flexing, to place an open palm against his desk.

“I've been thinking about him, and his therapy, and his work here for you. He has a penchant for these killers you show him; he cannot resist stepping inside the rooms they leave behind,” he says. “But he is not sleeping, and not eating. I cannot encourage him to continue.”

“You're supposed to be helping him. You're here to pull him from these places he finds himself in.”

“And I do,” Hannibal says, “And I will. He is susceptible, still, to the attraction of his own martyrdom. I feel he would suffer to show you he is not suffering at all.”

Jack sighs, scrubs a hand over his face. He glances out of his window—clear sky, white sunlight strewn across the windowpane, bare trees twitching in the wind. “What is there to do, Doctor? He's saving lives. I don't think he could turn away from this so easily—I gave him the opportunity to quit, and he refused, and he will refuse until he can't anymore,” he says. “Will needs structure, something solid to rely on, and that is me, and that is you.”

“Is he here?” Hannibal asks abruptly.

“Katz wanted him down in the lab. They're looking at the handprint. Tracking fingerprints again. Will you speak to him? He doesn't like this kind of talk.”

“He knows what I think,” he says, then, noticing the way he glances down at the picture on his desk—the appointment book flipped open, *Bella*, written at the top. “How is Bella, Jack?” He asks quietly.

“We're talking about Will.”

“Yes, aren't we often?” He glances down to his watch—2:13. Will's classes finished for the day, he knows from the calendar in his kitchen. “I am thinking of her, always. Of you both.”

“Thank you,” Jack says, although he seems unsettled. He looks at Hannibal for a stagnant moment, as though redrawing his image in his mind. “And thank you for what you do with Will. It still surprises me how much he's grown to like you—and you him. Perhaps you should be with him on the field more often.”

“It's my pleasure, and I would gladly,” Hannibal says, standing. Jack nods at him. “But please consider what I said.”

He finds the route to the lab with a sure-footed detachment. As though he can hear Will through the floors that separate him, see his glowing footprints leading him to where he

shouldn't step.

He finds Will with his cheek pressed against the cool slap of an autopsy table. He sits beside it on some fold-out chair and bends sideways to rest his head against it, one arm bent to cushion his temple. When he sees Hannibal, he tenses but does not move, his eyes sliding over him like liquid, undulating between colors in the fluorescent lights.

“Hi, Doctor,” Beverly Katz greets, glancing over her shoulder. He nods at her. Drops his eyes to the body presented before him: not his own, despite what Jack suggested, and is irritated to find it disappoints him to have not seen Will before it.

Now there is a woman with deep bruises on her thighs and arms, dark lines crossing starkly across her skin. Her stomach is so heavily bruised it appears near black, and her genitals have been mutilated to such a degree that it is difficult to discern what they are. Her labia are bloody and hairless, spread now like a fruit squeezed and torn.

Her vagina sits in the center of the mess, the proof of what she is: a bleeding cunt, an ax-wound between the open legs.

Hannibal glances sharply towards Will, who is pale and sickly, his eyes focused on the blood between her legs. He sits up, presses the heels of his palms into his eyes before he rises to stand before the table. He reaches out a hand to hover over her stomach. Beverly sways slightly on her feet.

“The third this month,” Will says.

“Sex-crimes,” Hannibal says.

“Woman-hating,” corrects Beverly.

Price rolls his shoulders. “We're going to do gel electrophoresis now. See if we can find anything he left that he didn't before.”

“Agarose will have set by now,” Zeller adds. “Where's the sample?”

“Semen?” Hannibal asks curiously.

Will nods his head. “Yes. The DNA fragments once cut will move through the gel when exposed to a current, depending on their size. We'll do samples from likely men in the area. See if we get a match.”

“Do you have any suspects?”

“A few, perhaps. Nothing definite. Men the women have in common: store clerks, delivery drivers, even men they might have passed on their way to work.” He looks up at Hannibal, to the light catching in his hair. “Nothing's certain. Everything is convoluted with uncertainty.”

Beverly Katz follows Price and Zeller out of the door, muttering about anodes and cathodes, anions and cations.

“Does he desire them?”

“He desires their suffering. He is—woman-hating,” he says, repeating Beverly, shoulders shifting with tension.

“It is not you, Will.”

“I know that,” he says. “I know. It's still an uncomfortable feeling.”

He is quiet, then glances around quickly, seeming to suddenly notice that they are now alone. He steps backwards. His plastic gloves stick to his palms. Hannibal follows his movement, his footsteps loud and distinct on the white floors. Everything is bright and gleaming.

“We have lots to discuss, Will,” he says, stepping closer until he is close enough for suspicion, for if someone were to walk in, they could read the words written on Hannibal's teeth: Kiss me. I adore you, still.

Will presses backwards onto the autopsy table, back curving slightly as though to create as much distance between them as he can. Hannibal wants to press a hand there, to dip his fingers into the dips of his spine, and bend it further.

“What is it that you want, Will?” He says, thighs almost touching, so close he can see the seaweed green that rings Will's pupil, the delicate curve of his upper lip; he can taste it, still —the heat and the hunger—that resided there, stained from his open mouth. “Tell me,” he adds softly, when Will is quiet.

Will frowns at him, lips curving downwards, glancing at the body still exposed on the table, the door that the others had left through. “God, Hannibal,” he says, “Not here.” Some stray emotion passes across face too quickly for Hannibal to decipher it, but it unsettles him still.

He slips past Hannibal, his hip bone brushing against his thigh, and doesn't turn back to look at him as he leaves.

Through the halls of the FBI, Hannibal slinks behind will. Cat-like, feline, as though a lion waiting in the grass for the zebra to bare its stripes. He follows Will into his office, past a series of winding corridors and standardized fire-doors, green shining above.

He shuts the door behind him. He follows Will to his desk. With the blinds shut, everything is dusky and shadowed, the light purple across Will's face.

Will leans back against his desk with his hands behind him, his eyes wide and expectant. His skin is dewy and unshed, like there is something growing beneath the surface.

“We can't keep doing this,” Will says.

“Doing what?”

“You chasing me. Me driving you away. This circle of push and pull.”

“It doesn't have to be,” Hannibal says, stalking forward. His muscles are poised; his mouth is of canines and hunger. When he moves, his bones slide past another, as though machinery.

“What do you propose?” Will sighs, his eyes slipping near-shut. He turns his head away, baring his cheek, the shadows beneath his eyes seeming to bleed down to his jaw; he looks bruised all over, the soft flesh colored by what bulges beneath.

“Give in to what you desire.”

“You?”

“Yes.”

“I can't stand you sometimes,” Will says, voice almost cracking over the words. He doesn't look at him, still, his eyes resolutely stationed on the non-descript artwork that rests on the wall. “Have you always had everything you wanted?”

“Not always,” Hannibal says. “I have had nothing. Everything I needed was taken from me.”

“I have nothing to give you.”

Hannibal steps forward, their positions mirroring that of in the lab. “You have everything,” he says, reaching a hand to cup the back of Will's neck. His fingers move to press against his jaw, forcing him to look at Hannibal. “You see into everybody but yourself, but you are not empty, Will. You are bursting with life; there are entire ecosystems inside of you, solar systems in your mouth. When you speak I hear futures for planets not our own.”

Will blinks up at him, his weight sagging between Hannibal's hand and the desk. He leans forward, dipping his face to speak into the curve of Hannibal's neck, though not quite touching, only close enough to feel the tides of his breath. “I can't see you,” he admits. “In your eyes there is no reflection. There are cities inside of you that I may never be able to find, and I think I will lose myself while trying.”

“I will guide you,” Hannibal says. “If you show me yourself.”

He tilts his face downwards, brushing his lips lightly across Will's own—barely a kiss, but the promise of one, the confession of the desire for more. Open your mouth, he thinks, and you will blind me with your light.

Will sighs into his mouth, tangling a hand in Hannibal's hair to press him deeper. It is soft and unhurried, their lips sliding wetly across one anothers, Hannibal daring to press his tongue to find the heat deep inside. “You once told me that our pleasures are not the same,” he says. “Do you remember?”

“Yes,” Will gasps, pressing an open-mouthed kiss to Hannibal's jaw. “They are not, still. You understand why they can't be.”

Hannibal slips his hands beneath Will's shirt, beginning to become familiar with the soft curves of his waist. Let me map out the contours of your body, your valleys and your mountains; let me find the rivers that run between. Touch me, and you will feel the pilgrim you have made of me, for I search for a place to build my monument of love.

“I do,” Hannibal says, “And I want you to accept what I give you, regardless.” He meets Will's mouth again, biting lightly at his lower lip.

“It was you who denied me before,” Will says, as though he did not pull back in the end. He thinks of that night in his kitchen, Will kissing him, molding himself to him—then a harsh push backwards, the back of his hand wiping across his mouth, refusing to meet Hannibal's eyes. He had slunk from the room, moody and blue, leaving Hannibal to stand lonesome in the darkness.

“I recall you pushed me away,” he says, “Despite kissing me.” His grip on Will is tight, and he feels childish debating like this. He pushes Will up harder against his desk, forcing his back to bow, a strangled cry hot in his ear.

“We shouldn't, Hannibal,” Will protests, making a half-hearted attempt to wriggle away. “Not here.”

“No one will bother us,” he says, stealing another kiss. “I love it how you say my name.”

Will laughs breathily, the sound not quite formed before it leaves his throat. “*Hannibal*,” he says, low and hushed, drawing out the word, “God, Hannibal.”

Hannibal slips a leg between Will's own, forcing them to part across his thigh, and when he presses forward Will bites harshly on his lip. “You make a fool out of me, Will,” he says. “No one has undone me quite like you do.”

“You don't know me that well,” Will says, sliding his nails down the back of Hannibal's neck. It is true—there are many things he does not know about Will: his favorite color, his middle name, where the scar on his hip bone is from. He kisses him; he has his hands inside of his head, and is moving around the wiring. He follows him home, and watches him at the store. But does not know how he likes his coffee, or his films, or his lovers.

“Not yet,” Hannibal says, “But I will, if you allow me to.”

Will hums against him, sighs in pleasure against his mouth. “You are not the first man to promise me the world,” he says.

It surprises Hannibal, slightly, for he could not imagine Will like this with another. Perhaps it is the obsession, and the desire to possess him, but it is an unfamiliar idea; Will is beautiful, but he is not always nice. He thinks, certainly, that no one could see him like Hannibal does.

“Don't be so surprised,” Will says, his hands stilling on Hannibal's shoulders. He is still pressed close, and moves his hips in small circles against Hannibal's thigh that makes him flushed and warm. “I had fun when I was young.”

“Did any of them ever stay, Will?” Hannibal asks, almost wanting to be cruel. He thinks, no one else could know you like I do. No one else could see the entirety of you and stay.

“I think you know.”

“Yes. I think I do.” He kisses the corner of Will's mouth. “And you couldn't stay either. How long do you expect us to last, Will, before you leave?”

“Perhaps we shouldn't begin. Save us both the trouble.”

“I don't accept that.”

Will hooks one of his fingers into Hannibal's belt loop. “Didn't think you would,” he says. He presses soft kisses to the side of Hannibal's neck and smooths his hand over the front of his pants. “This is very irresponsible of you, Doctor Lecter. Couldn't you lose your license?”

Hannibal rocks into his hand before pulling it away, keeping Will's wrist between his fingers. “You are not my patient,” he says, “And I have a very good lawyer.”

“No one has to know,” Will adds, hushed.

Hannibal takes his lip between his teeth. He slides a hand into Will's back pocket, pulling him closer, feeling the hardness there against his thigh. Will gasps into his mouth, rolling his hips again, and moves his hand back to Hannibal's bulge. He presses, his fingers sure and heavy.

“I feel like a teenager,” he says against Hannibal's cheek. “You make me feel young again.” He slows his movements, content to feel the slow pleasure that still diffuses from between his legs.

“You are young, Will. There is still much for you to learn.”

“And you plan to teach me?” Will says, raising his eyebrows. He hooks one of his bent legs around Hannibal's waist to pull him closer, pressing their sexes together. He rocks his hips, once, twice. Hannibal sighs into his mouth.

“Yes,” Hannibal says. “I want to show you everything.”

They kiss lazily, without direction, with no hurried intention of orgasm. Instead there lingers an unwelcome blush of desperation. Will curls beside him like a sea-shell, and Hannibal thinks: if I put you to my ear, would I hear your ocean?

Put me to your ear and you will hear my heart beating.

Here is the weight of him, the soft press of his lips, the wet muscle of his tongue exploring inside. Hannibal holds Will's leg around him by the bottom of his thigh, fingers curling inwards, tracing along the sensitive inner-muscle. Their joining is wet and messy.

Put me to your ear and I will try to crawl inside.

In the end, it is Beverly Katz who almost finds them.

He is unsure of how long it has been, for time has no meaning here. But he hears footsteps, fast and loud, down the corridor, heading directly to Will's office. He reacts instinctively, pulling Will into the adjoining closet. It is dark and cold. Will is very warm pressed against him.

Through the door the sound is muffled, but the door clicks open, and footsteps follow. “Will?” She calls, and he hides his smile into the curve of Hannibal's neck.

“This is ridiculous,” he whispers into Hannibal's ear. Hannibal holds him by the waist, his mouth on Will's hair.

Beverly doesn't stay long, her footsteps circling around the room before she leaves. For a second, they falter outside the closet door, and Hannibal pulls Will closer. There would be no hiding what they were doing, looking down at Will; the swollen lips, the hair messy and pulled, the half-lidded doped-out look in his eyes.

“No one has to know,” Will repeats, once they are sure that Beverly has gone, stepping out of the closet. He kisses Hannibal one last time before he moves away, stretching his arms and legs.

Bring me to your ear and you will hear the dove inside of me, singing the sound of love.

Chapter End Notes

This was originally going to be a slow-burn, but now has quickly diverged into Hannibal being crazy& a bit pathetic.

wide open

Chapter Notes

> Almost half a year since I last updated. So sorry. Exams finished me off, honestly. But I hope you like this one. We are finally (finally!) getting to the main plot. Did not think it would take 20K words. But.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The day after they find their killer, Will does not show up for work. Hannibal has heard about it: bodies strung up around a house in a sleepy town where the doors were frozen shut; cracks opening in the sidewalks; water seeping through the attic windows. And teeth clogging up the bathroom sink, all from different women, the hair on the shower wall not his own. He hears about it when he goes to Quantico to seek out Will, and instead finds his classroom empty, his office locked and still. That evening, when Will does not show up to his appointment, he ices out his Bentley and heats the seats, breath fogging in the cold.

The sky is overcast and thick with an approaching storm, the colour of charcoal and smoke. The ground has not frozen, but nor thawed, and in each town there are yellow pockets of light in his mirrors from the houses he passes, each darker than the last, curtains closing and doors snapping shut. Intrigue melts beneath his tongue. His hands are white around the steering wheel. By the time he reaches Will's house there is no light but that from his car, and it is swallowed by the ground.

A thin slice of the moon through a gap in the clouds. Will's door is not locked. He lets himself in to the crowding noses of the dogs, and he pushes through, hearing no sound but that of claws on the wooden floors. He does not call out. Nor switch on the lights. Through the dark doorway there is a figure curled over on the floor, beside a softly glowing heater.

Will's arms are folded beneath his head and his chest moves so slowly it almost seems to not. He is sweating. There is a pearlescent sheen on his forehead, orange in the glow from the heater. It strikes Hannibal with a strange sense of familiarity, thinking of the last time he had seen Will like this, and he can't help but to crouch down beside him, press his hand to his forehead, lean down low to press his tongue gently to the damp on his cheek. Then lower, to lick across his lips, pressing his fingertips to his teeth to feel the points of his canines. He is sweet. He tastes of coffee and spice.

When he is sure he won't awaken, Hannibal presses his fingers to Will's neck to feel his pulse, and finds that although slow it is strong and calm. After a moment of hesitancy he takes him by the arms and carries him to his bed, putting him beneath the covers and pulling them up high so as to keep out the cold. He takes off his belt, lingers with it in his hands, then puts it beneath his coat. Doesn't allow himself to think of it. He leans down to press his lips to the back of Will's neck and bites beneath where his hair will lie, leaving a bruise he will not

find. Hannibal fantasises: Will bruised all over, teeth marks up his legs, skin the colour of only passion fruit and milk. And the sweetness inside! He can taste it. He aches between his legs and teeth.

When he steps away Will shudders, curling into himself for warmth. Hannibal drags over the heater so that it rests closer, illuminating Will's face in such softened clarity that he commits it to memory; blinks once, like a lens. Burns it into where he seeks when alone. He watches him, and he wants, absurdly, to crawl into bed next to him.

Outside the world is frozen into standstill. Hannibal finds heat only in the white of the moon.

*

“I'm exhausted,” Will says, his hands spread out across his knees. “These dreams make me feel like I have a hole inside of me.”

“Describe them to me.”

Will shakes his head. He stands and begins to pace around the room, hands deep in his pockets, pausing only to pick up his wine glass from where he had left it. “You must see it,” he says, “What's happening to me. I wish you could tell me what is wrong.”

“You resist categorisation.”

“Not like this,” he argues. “I can't sleep. Everything is smudged with the unreality of dreams. How am I to separate my waking hours from sleep when the gap between them is closing, and I can barely discern them anymore?” He lifts his hands to his face, presses his heels into his eyes. “You have to tell me what is wrong with me. You have to know what it is.”

“I'd like you to draw a clock face,” Hannibal says instead. “Numbered. Small hand indicating the hour, large hand the minute.”

Will turns to face him with his eyebrows raised. “Why?”

“An exercise. I want you to focus on the present moment. The now. Often as you can, think of where you are. And when. Think of who you are.”

When Will hands back the paper, Hannibal wants to kiss him. Drown him in love.

“I was worried for you last week,” Hannibal says.

Will frowns at him. There are great discs of light on the wall behind him from the lamps around the room. “You shouldn't.”

Hannibal sighs. He stands and walks behind Will's chair to place his hand on his shoulder, thumb brushing over his neck. Behind his ear, there is the bruise he had left days before, fading into a green the colour of algae. “You know that I care for you,” he says. He leans down to press a gentle kiss to the side of his neck.

Will leans his head back against the chair, staring up at Hannibal. “Do you want to take me home tonight?” He asks, tilting his face to rest his cheek against Hannibal's palm. “Miss your cooking. Miss your mouth. Been thinking all week about it.”

Hannibal smiles at him, laughing at the incredulity of his flirtation. “You flatter me,” he says, leaning down to kiss his forehead; once, twice, before straightening up and grabbing his coat. Will bites one of his nails. He is frowning at the floor. “But I'm not easily distracted. Come. We can discuss it later.”

Will rolls his eyes. He drinks his wine in one swallow and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, the inside of his lips stained dark red. “Forgive me,” he says, insincerely. “Forget you're used to this kind of thing.”

“Psychiatry?”

“No. Please. You know what I mean.”

Hannibal holds open the door for Will when they leave and hears him stumble over his feet. “You're a horrible flirt,” Will says. “A tease. All of Baltimore wrapped around your finger.”

“But not you?”

“No.” He looks over his shoulder, his eyebrows raised. “If you did, I wouldn't like you so much,” he says.

“You spoil me,” Will says in his kitchen, putting away the last of the plates. His cheeks are flushed from drinking and he slips in and out from conversation, his eyes slow to settle on anything at all.

“You indulge me,” Hannibal says. “Is it too strange to believe that I enjoy it?”

“No.” Will smiles at him like they are sharing a secret. “But nobody's ever spent money on me like you do.”

“Not your father?”

“No. He did what he could. But money is different when it's everything. When there's nothing to spare.” He looks over his shoulder to where Hannibal has paused by the fridge. “I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful. I know that you have not always lived this way. But I was raised to never accept anything without expecting to give it back. And I don't want to. You understand me, don't you? I don't want to give you back.”

Hannibal smiles. He cannot help it. “I like you like this,” he says.

“Selfish?”

“Honest.” He crosses the kitchen to stand behind Will and rest his hands on his waist, leaning in close to press his nose into his neck. “And I won't take what I have given away from you, Will. If you want my honesty, I would not so easily let you go.” He flattens his palms onto his hip bones and presses his thumb into the crease of his thigh.

Will presses his hands onto the countertop. “I don't think I can be what you want,” he says. “Even being here feels like I'm not supposed to touch.” He sounds more amused than self-conscious, allowing his hips to be pulled back into Hannibal's hands.

“You don't know what I want you to be, and nor do I. Rather I enjoy watching only the shadows you leave. There are your footprints in the corners of my mind. You excite me so. Terribly. I've been thinking all week about you,” he says, reciting Will back to himself. “I could take you anywhere. Florence. Japan in bloom. Old English towns. You could see anything that you wanted.”

“What else?”

“A July sunset. The sunlight on the Teatro Massimo, the ground golden and bright. Your voice would carry. Everybody would hear you. I may have to keep you quiet so as to keep you all to myself.”

Will swallows. Hannibal hears the movement and smells sweetness at the back of his neck. He bites over the bruise and deepens it, so that it is bright and blotchy, the colour of chrysanthemums. “You're ridiculous,” Will says. “Are you like this with everybody you bring home?”

“Not particularly.”

“Mouths otherwise occupied?”

He bites back over the bruise. Will must think he has a fixation by now. “If that is what you would like,” he says, his teeth in Will's neck. “Anything, Will.”

Will does not stay the night, though Hannibal would have liked him to.

That night he sits on his bed with a box in his lap. It is wooden and old. There is lavender in the air. When he opens it he has to bite his tongue to hold back a smile. Inside: Will's belt, his book, a small bundle of hair tied together with twine. He touches it, thumbs over the coffee stains on the pages, dips his fingers into where Will has punched another hole in to the belt. Still, he mustn't linger on the sensations. He shuts it and puts it back beneath his bed, then lays back down in the darkness and thinks about the feeling of soft leather in his hands. Fantasises: slipping it out from Will's trousers, grabbing a fistful of hair, so sharply that it leaves strands between his fingers.

He reaches one hand up to his face and smells old leather, citrus shampoo, oil and sweat and smoke. Then down beneath the sheet, between his legs. He shuts his eyes, and there is Will all around him.

*

Jack calls him the next evening, as the sun is beginning to set. He tells him there is a scene he thinks he may want to see. He asks: is Will there? Of course. Of course, he is, Jack says. The sky is spotted with piercing light and the roads gleam red and orange. As he drives, he thinks as to how he can coax Will into coming home with him, for he knows it is likely Will will not plan on going home at all. He keeps spare clothes in his office, Hannibal knows. Cheap toothbrush and old deodorant, hidden in his bottom desk drawer.

The roads are quiet. Everything is black by the time he arrives, though in the white lights of Quantico there is a sense of timelessness, as if existing in many places at once. Downstairs, through the endless corridors of steel steps and fire-doors, green shining above, until he reaches the double doors of the lab.

“Dr Lecter!” Jack greets when he steps inside, startling Will to look up. His eyes are wide and dark, obscured by his glasses, and Hannibal thinks he can see something soften in the tightness of his jaw. Or perhaps it is the shifting of light across his face. He nods, and turns back to the body, stretched over the steel slab of the table.

“We've just got the body in,” Jack says, “From Washington. Had to move him before the local guys started touching around.”

Hannibal steps around the tables, closer, and smells the body before he can see it: swamp water, algae and rot, insects burrowing into the eyes. His skin is pale and violet. There are pond weeds wrapped around his arms, and moss blanketing his legs. The only part of him not covered by mud and undergrowth is the open plane of his face, sunken with rot, eyes left wide open. He must not have been here long, for there is water still trailing on the floor.

“How was he found?” Hannibal asks.

“Dog walker. They found him in a small pond outside of the city,” Beverly says. “His arms were tied to a tree to keep him afloat. We don't think he was there long. But there were already rats on his feet. The *smell*!”

“We're going to clean him first,” Price says. “You might want to come back in an hour, Doctor, if you want the exciting stuff.”

“It's no bother.”

He turns to Will, wanting to follow him back to his office again. Then—a slight buzz, almost indistinguishable from the hum of electricity in the air. He pauses. Does not speak. Tilts his

head to follow the sound. There is nothing, and then—louder this time, with purpose, insistence. The others notice, too, and everybody stops moving. Will frowns. He is staring at the body, his lips parted, his footsteps quiet and slow.

He stops in front of the body and presses one hand down onto the stomach. His eyes widen, almost comically, and he gestures for something to cut him open. He does so. And out spills a frantic fluttering of wings.

“Cardinal ladybird,” Will says, ten minutes later, once they can see through a haze of red and black. “Native to Australia.” There is one on the end of his finger, and he holds it up to the light. It glitters. It scurries down into his palm. “Larger spots than Harlequin ladybugs. Not quite as bright.” He speaks distantly, as though submerged in a dream. When he puts it back down on the table, it walks in a circle then crawls back to the body, with its stomach split wide open.

Hannibal almost smiles. Swallows it back. When he steps close he can see some still crawling around on the inside, in the spaces where his heart and stomach should be. Everything else is a mess. Beaten by the water, partly eaten, beginning to stink of rot and mould. He does not wrinkle his nose. But it is a near thing.

Everybody is looking at Will. “How did he get them in there? Why did we not hear anything before?” Beverly asks, kicking her foot around in the air to get off the bugs that have crawled onto her shoes.

“They've only just hatched,” Will says. He is single-focused. His eyes are glittering like there are ladybugs behind his glasses instead. “You can see it, look. They've not all come out yet. You probably want to remove them before they do. There must be hundreds here. Thousands.”

Jack looks to the ceiling, where they have flown up and trapped themselves trying to get out. He sighs, deeply. Brushes his forehead with his wrist. “We're never going to get rid of them,” he says. “When we catch this guy I want him eating only fucking ladybugs.”

*

On Tuesday, Hannibal takes Will out into the city.

When he finds him outside his front door he is wearing the coat Hannibal had bought for him. His hair is brushed from his forehead and curling around his ears. His eyes are wide open, the colour of jellyfish, and startling bright against his eyelashes. When he smiles, he shows his teeth. Sharp in the porch-light.

At the sight of him—shameless, coat unbuttoned to show his neck, lips parted, eyes wide open, wide open, so wide he wants to climb inside—he pushes him up against the door. Bites into his mouth. Teeth and spit, a bead of blood on Will's lip. He swallows his gasp, drags his fingers down the side of his neck to feel the jump of his pulse. Wide open. His mouth like a galaxy. He presses a kiss to the side of Will's mouth as one of his hands threads into Hannibal's hair.

“Hannibal. Jesus. What the fuck?” Will pulls back. His lip is bloody. There is a pink mark on his neck from the press of Hannibal's fingernail. Wide open. His eyes are round and searching. “God. You have *neighbours*. Jesus fucking Christ.”

“I don't care for them.”

He kisses his lips again, open-mouthed, drawing back to wipe his thumb across the bottom of Will's lip, where there is a smudged line of blood. He brings it to his mouth, licks, once twice, and watches Will's pupils blow open. “I've missed you,” he says, simply.

“Uh huh.” Will is still. There are still Hannibal's hands all over him, one slipped beneath his jacket to rest on his waist, the other at the back of his neck. He winds a curl of hair around his finger and massages his thumb against the back of his neck, feeling Will melt against him. The porch light paints him orange. Sticky with it. Wet with it.

He can feel Will's pulse against his thumb, fast but slowing, steadying as he relaxes against the door. Hannibal leans in once more to press a kiss to the side of Will's neck, murmuring. You look beautiful, he bites into the skin. He reaches between them to press his palm between Will's legs, a soft press to make him gasp, untangles himself, and steps away. Still against the door, Will's legs are parted; he has a finger between his lips. His eyes are so dark as to be subsumed by his pupil. Waiting for it. Opened wide.

“Are you coming, sweetheart?” Hannibal calls over his shoulder as he walks to his car. He sees Will jolt, his face flush, cheekbones cherry pink. He nods, an aborted movement, and slips into the passenger seat as Hannibal holds open the door. He brings his thumb up to his lips to wide away the blood. He swallows. Looks up to meet Hannibal's eyes, and his gaze is curious, heavy with desire.

The restaurant is cool and nestled between a shoe store and a bank. Inside it is lit with a warm orange glow, the windows half-hidden by drooping curtains the colour of pomegranates.

“Order for me?” Will says after one glass of wine. He had drunk it fast, too quickly to appreciate it for what it was, and his lips are dark and wet. He rests his chin on his palm

“Of course.” Hannibal smiles. Something lights up within. While looking at the menu before he had already decided what Will would be eating, but was only waiting for him to ask. “I will be disappointed if you come with me one day only to know what you want.”

Will hums in agreement. “You want me blind and stumbling.”

“Sometimes.”

Will laughs. Hannibal wonders if he drank in the car before he came to his door. “You seem happy today,” he says. “You look lovely in it.”

Looking at the table, Will pauses. He frowns. “I've been at the lab all day. Maybe it's all the ladybugs. They're everywhere, still. Yesterday I found them in my classroom, and it's hard to teach when there's insects pissing off all the students.”

“You've written about it.”

“You've read it?” Will asks, slightly incredulously.

“Yes.”

“There's not much to tell. The bugs were put there. Otherwise he was clean. Whoever killed him did well to keep him away from anything else before the water. And they weren't in there for long—eight hours, maybe twelve.”

“How do you know?”

“They weren't just put inside of him. They *hatched* inside of him. Ladybugs hibernate over the winter, so he must have kept them somewhere warm for enough time for them to mate, lay eggs, and develop for long enough as to finally hatch while inside of him.”

Hannibal pauses as if to consider the words. “That's why you didn't hear anything until the afternoon.”

“Exactly. It wasn't warm enough in the water. But by then I doubt it would have made much difference. By that point they had already grown four times and the larval stage was the longest, so as pupae he just had to wait long enough before putting them inside, so that they hatched when we had him in the lab.” Will drinks, his face lit up with interest. “They are cannibals, ladybugs. The females lay unfertilised eggs for the young to eat. It's common, actually, in insects. Inside of him we could see it; with all the adults hatching they were turning to one another for both mates and food.”

“In desperate times.”

“Not even such. Many arachnids cannibalise the male after mating. Black widows. Chinese mantis. Male nursery spiders feign death to avoid being eaten by the female in reproduction.”

Hannibal smiles. “Clever things. Though I imagine frustrating for the female.”

“Avoiding death?”

“It's awfully rude,” Hannibal says, “To deprive one of a hard-earned meal.”

*

He remembers: summers in the south of France. The side-walks burning his bare-feet, the grass the colour of his skin. There was a wall that he passed on his way to his apartment, a bridge over an unused rail-line, hidden by thick trees. On it, hundreds of ladybugs. Thousands. Red and black lit up by blades of light through the leaves. He remembers: sunsets late in the evening, a bruised sky, insects on his fingertips when he stopped to peer over the side. Below the gleaming metal of the train tracks. Orange in the light. Bursting red. And the flowers blooming. Scorched. Opened wide.

*

“We spoke to the guys in etymology yesterday. They had heard about what happened, of course. They were desperate to get their hands all over the body.”

It is dark outside. Will is tipsy and flushed. He said, his mouth pressed to Hannibal's ear as he slid into the car, that he does not have to go home tonight.

“Did you let them?”

“Yes. We want everything we can get. And—I like them. Not many people like insects at all. We'll be finding squashed ladybugs on the walls for weeks. Not that there isn't much we don't already know. You find them everywhere, and with the body being left in the water it muddies anything we can find about where they are from.”

Hannibal reaches over to lay his hand onto Will's thigh. “No suspects yet, I presume?”

Will scoffs, shakes his head, opens his legs a little wider. “God no. But we're creating a picture: knowledge about the bugs, enough space to work in, somewhere to keep them warm. Likely not an apartment. Somewhere near swamps, marshland. Meticulous knowledge of the differences in appearance between species. I don't think we have found even one of a different species. I'm beginning to form an image of somebody.”

“Somebody like you?” Hannibal says, lightly. He rubs his thumb against the outside of Will's leg and dips his fingers further between his thighs. “Be careful, sweetheart. Unless you have something you want to tell me.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. Hopefully next one won't take too long. Trying to be disciplined: read for an hour, write for an hour. I am not very disciplined.

desperate for it

Chapter Summary

Finally able to use the explicit tag.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this has taken so long, again :(Didn't anticipate university completely ruining my ability to sit & write.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I shouldn't be surprised,” Will says. His head is thrown back. His lips are parted. A scratch runs from his jaw to collarbone like a train-track. Hands in his pockets, he stands in the middle of Hannibal’s bedroom with his mismatched socks and ill-fitting pants, his skin softened and buttery in the low light. It is the color of apricots, of oranges. And so sweet as it spills across the room, when Hannibal opens his mouth.

Will turns to face him, holding eye contact for so long that Hannibal almost begins to feel uneasy. He thinks of staring into a pool of water and seeing not his reflection but an endless pooling of light. Will tilts his head to the side. His hands dip low. Fingers quick and steady, he unclasps his belt and leaves it hanging over Hannibal’s bed frame. Then his jacket: the soft leather, his calloused hands moving slow, to leave it by his feet. Hannibal thinks: woodsmoke, ears ringing after gunfire, sweat between the fingers. Blood beneath the tongue, behind the teeth.

Hannibal backs Will up to the bedframe and rests one hand on the back of his neck, gently, his fingertips tingling, brushing through the hair that curls there. He leans down to his neck to smell his anticipation. Cigarette smoke. A nip into his pulse. He opens his mouth and leans forward to kiss him, but Will moves before he can and instead of his lips, his teeth knock into Will’s jaw. He bites there, gently. So gently the feeling is strange in his teeth. He snakes his hands around Will’s waist and pulls him forward, feathering kisses across his jaw, up to his ear, reading back to find his mouth. Will reaches down to press one hand between Hannibal’s legs.

He rears back. He is still learning to be gentle.

Smiling, his body squirming, Will twists away and moves to stand by the window. His silhouette is a church in the city light. Hannibal flattens his chest to Will’s back and curls his hands around his waist, tighter this time, so that he cannot move. He presses kisses to the

back of his neck, open mouthed and wet, leaving bruises that he presses his tongue over. He fantasizes biting through until the bone. “Darling,” he mouths. His hair is caught in pockets of light. “You’re a tease.”

He drags Will back by his hips and twists him around to face one another. In the lamp-light he is flushed, pupils blown, lips parted to show the darting movement of his tongue. He walks backwards and lies down on the bed, eyes piercing and dark and hooded with pleasure, so that they are only narrow slits. Still he commands. Beckons him so. His legs are open. His head is thrown back. The cut on his neck—Hannibal kneels between his spread legs, and drags his tongue over it.

He grabs Will underneath his thighs and pulls him forward, bringing him close, close enough to feel his muscles tighten and relax around Hannibal’s own thighs. *Hannibal*, he mouths. *I feel crazy.*

The smooth undulation of hips. He drags his hands under Will’s shirt to feel his stomach jumping, and unbuttons it until he can throw it from the bed. Carelessly so. Desperate for it. Will reaches up for Hannibal’s own, eyes closed and neck bared, head thrown to the side. Hannibal does not care to know where it goes, thinks nothing of it, and only of the jolting hips beneath him, seeking contact; the half-breaths; the tongue moving in his mouth. He wants to swallow it down. He wants it for himself.

When Will’s hands move his pants, he sits back on his knees and guides the movement. He presses Will’s hands against himself, rocks his hips forward. Will bites his lip and looks up at Hannibal in such a way he has not before. The light on his face likens him to something seen only in dreams.

“You make me crazy,” Will breathes. He wraps his ankles around Hannibal's waist to pull him close. “Like you're waist deep in my head.”

“Would that be so terrible?”

“Will sighs into Hannibal's mouth, his lips slack. “What we do inside my head…” He says, “The things I let you do. You make me crazy. You turn me inside out.”

Hannibal lifts Will's hips to pull his pants past his knees, then his own, kicked off somewhere onto the floor. Thinks nothing of it. Beneath him Will is squirming again. Rocking upwards. “Won't you tell me?” Hannibal murmurs. “Sweetheart. I'll tell you anything to keep you. I'll tell you all you make me do.”

Will reaches to the waistband on Hannibal's underwear, and tugs it down. “You don't need me to say it out loud.”

“But I want to hear it.”

Will shakes his head. Teeth in his lip.

Hannibal relents, humming into his mouth. He touches Will between his legs and moves backwards to kiss his chest, his stomach, kneeling between his thighs to press his cheek to the

bare skin of Will's thighs. Will's hands reach out, as if by instinct, to thread through Hannibal's hair. Moonlight through the window pane. He takes Will into his mouth. And he thinks of sunlight lighting up every room in his mind at once.

Will's thighs over his shoulders, tensing and untensing. His back is arched. He moans up to the ceiling. Hannibal takes him from his mouth before he can come to crawl back up to his mouth, grinding lazily as he reaches to the bedside table. He can feel Will beneath him, moving desperately, fingers quick to reach between them and take Hannibal in his hand. He moans into Will's neck and pushes his fingers inside of him.

Later: sweat on his back, beneath his palms where he has grabbed beneath Will's thighs to push them up his chest. Will whispers, *That hurts*, and *Don't stop*, and Hannibal buries his face into his neck. Outside, snowfall. The open window brings in the sound of sirens and wet tires. The room lights up in red and blue. Beneath him, Will's eyes are closed. His mouth is open. He links his arms around Hannibal's neck then drops them to fist the sheets. He breathes out promises. Turns his mouth into a dreamscape that Hannibal wants to sink inside. He thinks, *Next time*. He thinks, *I'd do anything to keep you.*

*

Afterwards, Will lies beside him on his back, blank eyes up to the ceiling. He reaches one hand between his legs and it comes away wet. He brings it up to his mouth.

*

They don't mention it. When Will stands to go to the bathroom there is white running down his thighs. Hannibal listens to him showering with his body a weightless thing, pinned to the bed by the heat still in the air, the smell of sweat and semen. He thinks: the bent line of Will's throat, the sharp arch in his back when Hannibal ground his hips into the mattress, his breath in his ear, the sound of his moans, his voice in Hannibal's throat. He said, *You don't have to be so gentle,* and sunk his teeth into Hannibal's shoulder. And there are marks still in his skin.

He thinks of the mess between Will's thighs and can't bring himself to move. The shower switches off. Out floods a cloud of steam, and Will in the center, wrapped in one of Hannibal's towels.

His eyes dart to the open bathroom, as though in question. Hannibal watches him instead. His hair is wet and dripping, loose curls against his forehead. His thighs are red. There are pink marks on his waist from Hannibal's fingers, and on his neck he is bruised and bitten. He looks shameless. Desperate for it. Hannibal wants to tie him to the bed and never let him leave.

He reaches out for Will and catches him by the waist, pressing a kiss to the back of his hand. “Stay the night,” he says. Will nods. He drops the towel and crawls into the bed beside him, and Hannibal finds he does not mind the wet that seeps into the pillow by his head. He presses his face into Will's hair and smells his own shampoo. Runs his hands over Will's arms. He feels gross, both his body and his mouth, in need of a shower and a toothbrush and a hairbrush but doesn't think he can move from where he lays. He tugs Will's closer and tilts his head to the side so that he can look at him, Will curled into his side with his head just below Hannibal's arm.

He knows they are both thinking of it, but Hannibal doesn't want to say the words out loud. Will shuffles closer to rest his head on Hannibal's bicep, and looks into his eyes. “I liked it,” he says, simply. Hannibal runs his thumb over Will's bottom lip and he takes it into his mouth. “And I'm—.” Hannibal brings his thumb to his own lips and watches Will's pupils bloom.

“I know.”

Will nods. His eyelids flutter. “I ache.”

Hannibal kisses his forehead. “Good,” he says.

*

Hannibal lingers in the doorway of Will's classroom as he talks to a student at his desk. They are tall and tan, light hair the color of dirty river water. His fingers clasp and unclasp his watch. He bites his lip, and looks alternately between Will's face and his shoes.

“Thank you, Professor,” he says, voice uneven with nerves. “I'll keep it in mind. Thank you.”

Will nods at him, eyes flitting over the top of his glasses to behind the student's shoulder, where he spots Hannibal. He smiles, and Hannibal wishes desperately to take him back home. Or to lock the door behind himself. As the student passes by he smells sweat and anxiety, ink and paper-bag takeouts. It charms him, almost, because he imagines Will to have been the same.

“Doctor. I wasn't expecting you,” Will says as he approaches. He leans on his desk with his hands between his spread thighs.

“I know. I brought you lunch.”

“Oh. Thank you. Do you want—do you want to sit?”

He quickly stacks the loose papers scattered over the desk and puts them on his laptop, dragging a chair over to put it beside his own. He sits and gestures for Hannibal to take his desk chair, and Hannibal finds it more endearing than he thinks he should. In his bag, two

boxes, still warm, which he puts on Will's desk. He hands Will a knife and fork and watches as his eyes go wide.

“Wow. Oh. This is for me? Smells delicious.”

“Of course,” says Hannibal, opening his own box. “Katsudon: a popular pork dish in Japan. Was that one of your students?”

Will hums around his fork, managing to look both appreciative and exhausted. “Yes. He wanted some help with his assignment. God. This is good.”

Hannibal smiles. “He seemed nervous.”

“They always do. Don't think they like me too much.”

“On the contrary, I think they like you a lot. Intimidated by you, perhaps. They have a lot to learn.”

“Sometimes it feels like I'm just repeating the same thing back to them again and again. Hoping one of them is smart enough to read between the lines. Or get out.”

“They respect you. You wouldn't be here without it.”

Will is quiet. He stares at some far away point on the floor.

“I dislike your opinion of yourself,” Hannibal says, drawing Will's attention back to himself, his eyebrows drawn together, his lips pressed thin. “I resent how Jack makes you feel.”

“I'm not a child,” Will objects.

“And yet.”

Hannibal reaches out to drag his thumb over the bruise that peeks from beneath Will's collar, unperturbed when he flinches away.

“You act like one for him.”

“He means well.”

Hannibal leans closer, his lunch half-forgotten. “For everybody else. Not for you. I care only for you.”

Will swallows. He leans back in his chair and away from Hannibal's hands, his hands paused in his lap. “I've been thinking about what you said. Or what you've been saying. About childhood. Things like that.”

Hannibal inclines his head in invitation. “When my dad died I thought it'd kill me too. I couldn't live knowing how we treated each other. How we'd wasted our time. You're dredging up truths about me I didn't think I had.”

“Good. You must purge yourself. Still he lives inside your head, behind your hand, beneath your tongue when you speak. I want you to sever his fists around you. Replace the fingerprints.”

“You're not my father, Hannibal,” Will says desperately. He doesn't meet his eyes, or look anywhere near his face.

“No. I am not. You don't defer to me.”

“You want me to stay away from Jack.”

“He's a poor substitute.”

“And you aren't?”

Will flinches away when he tries to reach out again. “I'm not your father, Will.”

Will pushes his palms over his eyes, his half-eaten lunch on his desk before him. It's no matter, Hannibal thinks, it will not be the last time. “I know,” Will says, “I know.”

Hannibal sighs. He crosses his legs. “You act like you expect me to disappoint you. It hurts me. I wish for you to trust me.”

“I do trust you. I let you—I let you. You didn't even put on a condom.”

“You didn't ask.”

Will's mouth down-turns at the corners. “I feel guilty. You keep doing things for me. Buying me things. I'm indebted. You know what it is.”

“I don't view it as such.”

“Then how?”

“I enjoy it. I remember, you did too. Do you recall—you told me, the night at my house, that it made you feel cared for.”

Will frowns. He looks sick, all of a sudden. “I don't remember.”

“No?” Hannibal smiles as though he is sad. “Then you will have to tell me again. A hundred times. A thousand. I couldn't tire of your voice, of your words in my mouth. It was cold outside. You told me you didn't want to give me back. Don't you remember, sweetheart? You said you felt selfish.”

“I am selfish.”

“Not enough. Would it be so wrong to indulge me?”

Will rests his elbow on the table with his forehead in his palm. “God,” he says. “You're making me a mess. I don't know what to do around you anymore.”

“You don't have to do anything. Let me take care of you. I want only to see you well, and happy. This doesn't have to be your life, Will.”

“You're so good to me.”

“Yet you deserve more.” He runs his fingers down Will's arm in a placating gesture. “Come. Eat your lunch. We will start with the body.”

*

The aftermath: the morning sun through the window, the room in gold and white; Will beside him, turned away, the harsh line of his spine uncovered from the sheets. His neck was bruised and pink, his shoulders tucked inwards; a loose strand of hair lay on the pillow beside his head. Hannibal reached out, tenderly, to trace the curve of his waist. His muscles twitched. His stomach pulled tight, then relaxed into Hannibal's hand. Will pressed his face into the pillow, then looked over his shoulder, still hazy and blurred with sleep. He rolled over, mumbled something Hannibal could not understand, and fell quickly back to sleep.

The bedroom becoming a dreamscape. Hannibal watched him slumber. His dark hair. The scar on his shoulder. He leaned down to press his mouth to it, his tongue. He thought of all he was planning to do to keep him close, to keep him defenseless and unarmored. Then, the sound of bird song. The smell of spinning tires. And bitter coffee. And melting frost. He closed his eyes to the mouth of the city and pressed his own to Will's shoulder blades. As though to swallow him whole. To put him inside and keep him there.

Breakfast: a quiet thing. Hannibal left Will in bed to shower and cooked for him, if only for something to do. He stared at him over the wide rim of his mug, over his fork, unabashedly at first when Will was not looking, and then when he was. Muttered promises for a repeat. A kiss on the lips at the door. I had fun, then, *See you later,* then, *I'm covered in your teeth.*

Hannibal smiled at him. Kissed him again, with force, with intention. *I'll miss you in my bed,* he said.

Then: *I'll miss you*.

*

“Has Will come to see you?” Hannibal asks.

Abigail sits opposite him, her skin pale and smooth, her eyelashes long, her eyes wide and doe-like and young. “Last week. He said he's not sure when he can come again. Something about work. I don't know. I just think he doesn't want to see me.”

“Why?”

She shrugs. “He doesn't know how to be a father. He knows he doesn't. But he's trying anyway. I don't know if I know how to be a daughter anymore, anyway.”

“Your idea of family has been uprooted. It's natural to wonder how it can grow again. Or how you can grow with it, and with whom.”

She smiles, ungenuine. She has a red scarf around her neck, the color of rubies. Her hair is neat and brushed slick down her back.“You mean yourself? It's not just Will. You want to be my father too—and you want him to do it with you. Does he know?”

“He knows that we both care for you, and that we want to look after you. He doesn't mind how it happens. We just want you to be safe.”

“So did my Dad.”

Hannibal sighs. He reaches out to trace his thumb over her wrist bone, like he would to Will. Outside the grass is white with frost. It is beginning to creep up the window panes.

“It doesn't have to be the same, Abigail. You've been given chances, choices, a way out,” he says. He catches her eyes and holds her wrist gently in his hand. “What is it you think of, when you think of him? Your kitchen? The morning sunlight. The smell of sausages, of steam from the shower. It doesn't have to end this way. We can help you deconstruct and build another.”

“Another world?”

Hannibal smiles. “Yes. Another opening. This doesn't have to be your life, Abigail.”

*

Will moans into the pillow.

“You're perfect,” Hannibal says into his neck. “I wish I could keep you this way forever.”

He presses kisses over Will's neck with his arms bracketing Will's own, pushing his hands into the mattress. The sky is the color of fig skin. It is cloudless and gaping. He sits up on his knees to grab Will's hip in one hand and press his other onto his lower back, forcing him into a sharp arch. Will moans with it. He has his hands buried beneath the pillows. Outside, the streets are dim with the last minutes of sunlight, and Will is bruised in violet.

He slows, and slides his hand up Will's back to rest at the back of his neck. Beneath his fingers he feels Will swallow and breathe out words Hannibal does not hear; cannot, for he thinks solely of the pulse he feels when he presses his fingers just so, how it is fast and uneven and jumping into Hannibal's skin. He rocks his hips forward, once, twice, and presses down harder. Feels him gasp and breathe and moan.

Will goes limp and sinks into the mattress. He turns his head to the side to stare out the window, because Hannibal does not let him shut the curtains. The moon slinks over the cityline. Will lights up like a lightning strike.

*

“Can I see you?” Hannibal asks into the phone.

The streets of Baltimore are busy and wet. The sidewalks are crowded with businessmen and noise, people crawling in and out of taxis, heads ducked, arms pulled tight to their chests.

“Not tonight. We're bringing a guy in. For interviewing. For questioning.”

“Your killer?”

“Hopefully. I can't tell you right now. Jack wants me to speak to him in an hour.”

Hannibal smiles. He ducks into a shaded alleyway to step away from the noise. “You must tell me how it goes. Call me when you can. I'll be glad to see you again.”

Will says, Of course. He says, I'll speak to you soon, and Hannibal stares into his phone as if to pull his voice through it.

*

“Who is he?” Hannibal asks Alana behind the glass. In the interrogation rooms sits Will and his suspect. He is thin and gaunt, with dark hair and narrow glasses that sit on the end of his nose. He is dressed in dark jeans and a gray sweatshirt, his shirt untucked and creased, as though thrown on from the floor. Hannibal thinks he can smell himself on Will. Or perhaps it is wistful thinking.

“A coworker from a few years ago. Bug enthusiast. Everybody knew it. He moved to Baltimore three years ago after being arrested for harassment in Maine.”

“What did they find?”

“Once the news hit the papers there were anonymous calls from some old-coworkers. They'd read Tattlecrime and said it reminded them of him. They've not found anything concrete yet —but Jack is hopeful.”

“And Will?”

She smiles, a joyless thing. “Who knows what he's thinking.” She pauses, licks her lips. “I think he's seeing someone.”

“Oh?”

Her hands in her pockets. Rocking up onto the balls of her feet, then down again. “Yeah. He seems—different. Like he's always thinking of something else.” She looks sideways at him with a small smile, conspirational, and gestures up to her neck. “And haven't you seen? Just a little. When he tilts his head a certain way.”

Hannibal can't help the delight that blossoms. “He's not mentioned it to me. But I did wonder.”

She sighs, looking back through the glass. “He must think I'm awful for what I said to him, when there is somebody that doesn't think the same.”

“Do you regret it?”

“No. It wasn't just that. I have boundaries with myself. I'm just not sure that Will does.”

“You don't trust him to know what he needs?”

“Do you?”

Hannibal turns back to face the suspect. He can smell his cologne on the collar of Will’s shirt.

*

They keep him overnight.

Hannibal finds Will in his office, pacing and agitated. His hands are clenching and unclenching. His lips are pulled between his teeth. When he sees Hannibal, he shakes his head and puts his hands in his hair.

“It doesn't feel right,” he says. “Why doesn't it feel right?”

“What do you see?”

“A stalker. A criminal. But not a *murderer*.”

“Tell me.”

Will is quiet. Hannibal moves to him with one hand outstretched and Will flinches away.

“Everything points to him. His house, the relationship, the stalking, the hair. Did you know? That they found his hair near the body? It *has* to be.”

“And yet?”

Will is pacing, still. “I can't *see* it. Jack thinks I’m being difficult. He says I’m not satisfied because I didn't do it all myself. Whatever that means.”

“I think you should go home.”

Will pauses. He glares at Hannibal and almost bears his teeth with the twist of his grimace. “What are you doing here?”

“I wanted to talk to Alana, and then I wanted to see you.”

“Oh.” Will puts his hands in his pockets. “What did you see her about?” He says, trying to seem nonchalant.

Hannibal smiles. “I’m hosting a dinner party,” he says. He settles his hands around Will’s waist and leans down to kiss him, once, twice. “I trust that you will come.”

*

Later, in bed, Hannibal's iPad lights his fingers up in blue. It opens to TattleCrime, and Freddy Lounds’ most recent article: a photograph of the suspect in the interrogation room, his face blurred. Underneath, a picture of a ladybug. Swampland. A lily flower.

*

“It wasn't him,” Will says the next morning as he pulls Hannibal down by his tie. His eyes are wide and near-manic. His mouth is demanding and wet. Hannibal smiles against his lips. He reaches down to thumb at Will’s belt, and tangles his other hand in his hair.

“You clever thing,” he murmurs. It is morning. The coffee is still hot. The grass is frosted. The kitchen smells like cinnamon and orange, as though it is summer, as though it is bright. And Will mouths over his neck in a way that will not bruise, although Hannibal almost wishes it would.

Outside the sunlight is white and harsh. But through the windowpane it is springtime.

Chapter End Notes

I'm determined to finish this if only because I'm desperate to write the ending. Thank you for reading!!

End Notes

Writing from Hannibal's perspective is hard and dialogue for me even more so, so I hope this didn't read too awkwardly....

Please let me know what you thought—and thank you for reading, always.

my Tumblr:
occultiisms

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